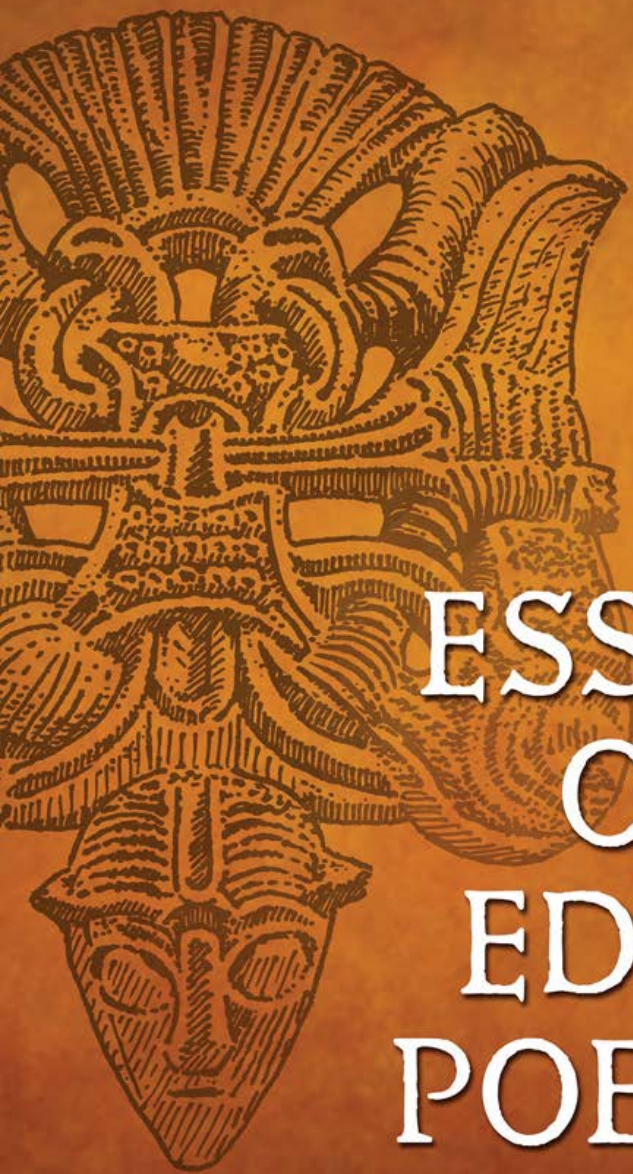




ESSAYS ON EDDIC POETRY

John McKinnell

Edited by Donata Kick and John D. Shafer

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Essays on Eddic Poetry

John McKinnell

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Essays on Eddic Poetry presents a selection of important articles on Old Norse literature by noted medievalist John McKinnell. While McKinnell's work addresses many of the perennial issues in the study of Old Norse, this collection has a special focus on the interplay between heathen and Christian world-views in the poems.

Among the texts examined are *Hávamál*, which includes an elegantly cynical poem about Óðinn's sexual intrigues and a more mystical one about his self-sacrifice on the world-tree in order to gain magical wisdom; *Völundarkviða*, which recounts an elvish smith's revenge for his captivity and maiming; and *Hervararkviða*, where the heroine bravely but foolishly raises her dead father to demand the deadly sword Tyrfingr from him.

Originally published between 1988 and 2008, these twelve essays cover a wide range of mythological and heroic poems and have been revised and updated to reflect the latest scholarship.

(Toronto Old Norse and Icelandic Series)

JOHN MCKINNELL is an emeritus professor of Medieval Literature at Durham University.

DONATA KICK is an independent scholar with a PhD in medieval studies from Durham University.

JOHN D. SHAFER holds a PhD from Durham University. He is a Visiting Fellow in the School of English at the University of Nottingham.

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John McKinnell

Edited by Donata Kick and John D. Shafer

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Acknowledgments

The essays in this book have previously been published in the places listed below, but in many cases this re-publication has provided an opportunity to include revisions, second thoughts, and reflections on more recently published work on the topics concerned. To avoid the problems in citation that this might cause, those essays that have been significantly revised have also had their titles modified since their first publications (which are not included in the Bibliography).

1. ‘*Vǫluspá* and the Feast of Easter’ is reprinted from *alvíssmál* 13 (2008), 3–28, where it is at present only available online at <http://alvissmal.org/12vsp.pdf>.
2. ‘On *Heiðr* and *Gullveig*’ is a revised version of ‘On *Heiðr*,’ *Saga-Book* 25:4 (2001), 394–417.
3. ‘The Evolution of *Hávamál*’ is a revised and slightly shortened version of ‘The Making of *Hávamál*,’ *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia* 3 (2007), 75–116.
4. ‘*Hávamál B*: a Reconstructed Poem of Sexual Intrigue’ is a shortened version of ‘*Hávamál B*: a Poem of Sexual Intrigue,’ *Saga-Book* 29 (2005), 83–114.
5. ‘Wisdom from Dead Relatives: the *Ljóðatal* section of *Hávamál*’ is a shortened version of ‘Wisdom from the Dead: The *Ljóðatal* Section of *Hávamál*,’ *Medium Ævum* 76 (2007), 85–115.
6. ‘The Paradox of *Vafþrúðnismál*’ is a revised version of ‘Late Heathen Views of the World: 1. *Vafþrúðnismál*,’ chapter 4 of John McKinnell and Maria Elena Ruggerini, *Both One and Many* (Rome: Il Calamo, 1994), 87–106.
7. ‘Motivation and Meaning in *Lokasenna*’ is a revised version of ‘Motivation in *Lokasenna*,’ *Saga-Book* 22:3–4 (1987–88), 234–62.

8. 'Myth as Therapy: the Function of *Þrymskviða*' first appeared in *Medium Ævum* 69 (2000), 1–20.
9. '*Völundarkviða*: Origins and Interpretation' is a revised version of 'The Context of *Völundarkviða*,' *Saga-Book* 23:1 (1990), 1–27, a shortened form of which was then reprinted in *The Poetic Edda: Essays on Old Norse Mythology*, ed. Paul Acker and Carolyn Larrington (New York: Routledge, 2002), 195–212.
10. 'Female Reactions to the Death of Sigurðr' is revised from 'Female Reactions to the Death of Sigurðr / Sifrit,' in *La Chanson des Nibelungen hier et aujourd'hui*, ed. Danielle Buschinger and Wolfgang Spiewok, *Wodan* 7 (1991), 99–111.
11. 'Two Sex Goddesses: Þorgerðr Hølgabrúðr and Freyja in *Hyndluljóð*' is a revised version of 'Þorgerðr Hølgabrúðr and *Hyndluljóð*,' in *Mythological Women: Studies in Memory of Lotte Motz*, ed. Rudolf Simek and Wilhelm Heizmann (Vienna: Fassbaender, 2002), 265–90.
12. 'The Trouble with Father: *Hervararkviða* and the Adaptation of Traditional Story-patterns' is a revised version of 'The Trouble with Father: *Hervararkviða* and Cross-Sexual Encounters with the Other World,' in *Myth and Its Legacy in European Literature*, ed. N. Thomas and F. le Saux (Durham: Durham Modern Language Series, 1995), 63–92.

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Introduction

John McKinnell's appetite for medieval studies and traditional narrative was originally whetted by the traditions of oral history, ballad, and storytelling in the small fishing and farming community on the east coast of Scotland where he spent much of his childhood. As a student at Worcester College, Oxford, and later at the Arnamagnæan Institute in Copenhagen, McKinnell was inspired with an enthusiasm for Old Norse mythological and heroic poetry by the major figures whose lectures he heard and under whom he studied, including J.R.R. Tolkien, Gabriel Turville-Petre, Stefán Karlsson, and Jón Helgason. He was appointed to a temporary lectureship in medieval literature at the University of Durham in 1965, and remained there throughout his career, retiring as a professor in December 2007; he continues to do some teaching and examining in Durham's English Studies department and remains active in research.

McKinnell's scholarship has ranged widely within the fields of Old Norse literature, Old and Middle English literature, early English drama, runology, and various other areas within medieval studies, but one of his primary research interests has always been in Old Norse myth, legend, and literature and their synthesis in eddic poetry. However, the approaches he has adopted to the eddic poems have varied greatly, largely because, as he and his collaborator Maria Elena Ruggerini sought to show in *Both One and Many: Essays on Change and Variety in Late Norse Heathenism* (1994), Old Norse mythology was in many ways a shifting amalgam of different traditions, in which different, mutually contradictory stories could be told (or the same stories could be told in different ways) and different cults were practised, to some extent in competition with each other. Far from being monolithic and orthodox, Norse heathenism changed and developed from storyteller to storyteller, and was ultimately recorded in permanent forms by scribes who were themselves Christian and who also had a variety of interests and reasons for recording and adapting the stories they had inherited from their heathen ancestors.

For this reason, different approaches may be appropriate for different poems, and it can often be fruitful to approach a single poem in several different ways, provided that three general principles are constantly borne in mind. First, any interpretation of a poem must be based on the text as we have it in the manuscripts, with as little emendation as possible, and must pay scrupulous attention to the grammar and history of the Old Norse language. Second, it must be compatible with the world view(s) that could be imagined at the supposed time of composition and should not ‘colonise’ the literature of the past by imposing fashionable but exclusively modern ideas on it. Finally, we should remember that parchment was expensive and copying was laborious and time-consuming, so those who preserved and listened to these texts must have seen social, moral, or psychological value in them.

The present volume collects revised versions of a dozen of McKinnell’s previously published articles on eddic poetry. The articles were originally written and published at various points in McKinnell’s career between 1988 and 2008, and they adopt a variety of literary and philological approaches to the analysis of several eddic poems. One factor unifying these articles is their focus on traditional problems that have occupied eddic scholars for many years. To some of these familiar problems, McKinnell suggests possible solutions. To others that defy definitive answers, he offers in-depth analysis and suggests avenues of research down which answers may one day be found.

There may be no more pervasive issue within the study of eddic poetry than how great the Christian influence on poems narrating heathen mythological information has been, as well as what form that influence took. *Völuspá* in particular has been the focus of much of the attention devoted to this issue. In the opening essay in this book, McKinnell first analyses the question of *Völuspá*’s authorship, producing arguments in favour of a heathen author with some knowledge of Christianity. He then considers what criteria should be used to evaluate the probability of particular claimed sources having been direct influences on this poem, and in particular how a poet who seems not to have been Christian himself could have heard vernacular versions of the biblical verses from Genesis, St Mark’s Gospel and the Book of Revelations that seem to be echoed in the poem. He argues that precisely these parts of the Bible could have been heard by a heathen who attended the open parts of the Easter Vigil and Easter Mass services as part of the process of being ‘prime-signed.’

The second paper revisits the evidence for the traditional explanation of two stanzas in *Völuspá* which links the enigmatic mythological female figures of Gullveig and Heiðr by suggesting that *Gullveig* means ‘the intoxication of gold,’ who is burned three times and then reborn as *Heiðr*, whose name is taken to mean ‘bright.’ But the manuscript form *Heiði* is the dative singular, not of

the adjective meaning ‘bright’ or the noun meaning ‘brightness,’ but of the noun meaning ‘heath,’ and *-veig* cannot mean ‘intoxication’; a more likely explanation of the passage may therefore be that *Gullveig* means ‘the lady made of ‘gold’ (probably Freyja), while *Heiðr* (a traditional name for a propheticess) refers to the speaker of the poem. Using evidence from other primary sources and marshalling a great deal of previous scholarship, McKinnell then considers the possible connections of *Gullveig* and *Heiðr* with the similarly enigmatic female figures of Þorgerðr Hǫlgabrúðr and Hyndla.

Beginning with a brief summary of Karl Müllenhoff’s widely accepted 1891 division of *Hávamál* into six original poems, the third paper in this volume considers other views of the origins of the poem. McKinnell gives his own, alternative explanation for the poem’s diversity, ultimately suggesting that the compilation of *Hávamál* may have gone through three stages of development: first, four more or less complete poems were collected together; next, a writer with encyclopaedic interests added a variety of other pre-existing stanzas of miscellaneous ‘Odinic’ material; finally, an overall editor added small amounts of text in order to present all 164 stanzas as a single poem. The paper includes a few brief observations about two of these proposed original poems, ‘The Gnostic Poem’ (*Hávamál A*) and *Loddfáfnismál* (*Hávamál C*), both of which consist largely of pieces of practical advice, although the Gnostic Poem is considerably more amoral in its outlook than *Loddfáfnismál*.

The two following essays go on to investigate in greater detail the other two sections, ‘The Poem of Sexual Intrigue’ (*Hávamál B*) and *Ljóðatal* (*Hávamál D*). Norse scholars have previously noted evidence of the influence of post-Conversion thought on *Hávamál B*, and McKinnell devotes a great deal of attention to the poem’s probable connections with certain Latin literary works that were available in the schoolroom, notably Ovid’s *Ars Amatoria* and (less certainly) Virgil’s *Eclogue X*. He uses these connections to show how the poet, who was probably working in the twelfth century, combines sexual advice derived from Ovid with two stories inherited from pre-Christian mythology to craft a witty (if cynical) poem of special force and significance within his own culture.

In his paper on *Ljóðatal*, McKinnell first addresses the long-standing debate about Christian influence on the stanzas narrating Óðinn’s crucifixion-like self-offering on the World Tree, concluding that such influence was probably grafted onto pre-existing heathen myth and ritual, and that the poet visualises Óðinn as actually dying, going to the world of the dead to obtain nine mighty spells from his giant uncle, and generating nine more spells of his own as he returns to new life. McKinnell then refocuses scholarly attention from this well-worn area to the main material of the poem, the eighteen magic songs for which Óðinn has sacrificed himself, showing that the first nine are part of

a traditional pattern (but one in which the poet has substituted a male for an originally female informant), while the second nine are probably the poet's own invention on the basis of Óðinn's traditional areas of patronage.

The collection's sixth paper analyses *Vafþrúðnismál* from five perspectives: the uncertainty of its date of composition; the poem's formal structure; its received story, a traditional lethal wisdom contest; the logical dilemma presented by the outcome of the fatal contest depending on the answer to one of the questions concerning fixed fate; and the largely amoral, heathen ideology of the poem. Like most of the other essays in this book, this study re-addresses a couple of the debates that have surrounded this text: McKinnell re-evaluates previous scholarly assessments of *Vafþrúðnismál*'s supposed great age and shows that far from being formless, as many earlier scholars have thought, it has a clear and elegant structure which is articulated by the poem's three refrains.

The seventh paper originated more directly than the others in this volume in scholarly dialogue, some of the original ideas having arisen from discussion with one of Professor McKinnell's MA students, Geoffrey Daniel, and later having been developed for an audience of Scandinavian Studies scholars at University College, London, and further refined by the resulting discussion. This paper poses a single main question: what is the reason for the argument in *Lokasenna*? After dealing briefly with a couple of more easily answered narrative issues, McKinnell moves on to analyse this question and develop a functional explanation from textual evidence collated from this and others of the mythological eddic poems: he concludes that Loki's allegations of injustice and perversion or cowardice among the gods must be seen as broadly true, and that he is motivated by enmity towards them and a desire to hasten Ragnarök.

A resolution to the perennial problem of the vastly divergent estimates for *Þrymskviða*'s date of composition is proposed in the eighth paper; McKinnell suggests that the early, heathen features of the poem and the late, Christian ones can be accounted for by early influence of Anglo-Norse poetry on an original heathen myth. Determining that the purpose of heathen mythological poetry is not devotional in any way, McKinnell aims with this analysis to examine what the useful functions of the *Þrymskviða* myth might be. Social and psychological interpretations are provided, and an argument defending the validity of using them is given; ultimately they are reconciled with each other and Þórr's progress from ineffective fool to triumphant hero is described.

The next two essays distinguish themselves from the others in the collection by examining legendary rather than exclusively mythological material. The ninth essay, on *Völundarkviða*, is devoted to two main topics. The first half of the paper analyses at length the traditional problem of the poem's provenance and date, evaluating the evidence that has been provided for origin within,

variously, a Norse-speaking community in England, northern Norway, and an Old Saxon-speaking area of continental Europe, and concluding that the first of these is the most likely. Since Old Norse was probably spoken in England for a relatively short time (ca. 900–ca.1050), this may help in the dating of the poem. The second part of the essay seeks to provide an antidote to the common method of analysing the two archetypal stories on which *Völundarkviða*'s plot is based, in which the archetypes are often used to draw conclusions the text itself does not support. McKinnell instead offers a stripped-down analysis of the poem and what is distinctive about the way it tells its story, howsoever it is based on previously existing archetypes.

In the tenth essay McKinnell investigates reactions of female characters in the Edda's relevant legendary poems to the death of Sigurðr. Of the papers in this volume, this is the one perhaps least concerned with a point of previous scholarly congestion. McKinnell nevertheless couches his in-depth analysis of the presentation of these women as a response to previous critical dismissal of the psychological shallowness of these same women at this same moment in the *Nibelungenlied* as typical of medieval lack of interest in the human psyche. He shows that later eddic poets develop an interest in the psychology of grief which is most easily expressed by expanding the amount of direct speech attributed to female characters, who are less inhibited than men by the social requirement to be stoical.

In the eleventh paper in this book McKinnell addresses the questions surrounding another female figure, the mysterious, powerful Þorgerðr Hølgabrúðr, referring continually back to previous interpretations of the evidence for her identity and attributes (especially the scholarship of Nora Chadwick and Lotte Motz). Beginning first with an analysis of the many forms of Þorgerðr's name and their implications for her cult and its provenance, McKinnell goes on to forge connections between Þorgerðr and the Vanir cult as manifested in both texts and artefacts, dealing at most length with the similarities between Þorgerðr and the Freyja presented in *Hyndluljóð*.

The twelfth and final essay slightly alters the trend of investigating questions familiar from other scholars' previous studies, instead addressing a topic within an area in which McKinnell himself has spent a great deal of study: cross-gender encounters between representatives of humanity and other-world beings. In his 2003 article 'Encounters with *Völur*' and later (and in much greater depth) in his 2005 book *Meeting the Other in Norse Myth and Legend*, McKinnell deals with encounters between human or divine males and monstrous females, characterizing the myths according to their narrative patterns and meanings. This paper considers one of the exceptional cases of cross-sexual inter-world encounter in which the representative of This World

is female, the story told in *Hervararkviða*. In it McKinnell shows how the poet uses and adapts the familiar, almost exclusively male-centred stories to his own, new purposes and is thus able to address problematic gender and intergenerational relationships.

The Fourteenth International Saga Conference in Uppsala in 2009 saw John McKinnell honoured with the presentation of a Festschrift produced primarily by his Italian friends and colleagues, and two years later a second, more international Festschrift was published, containing contributions from some of the foremost scholars in the Old Norse and Old English academic community.¹ John now reciprocates by giving us a collection of some of his own scholarship on eddic poetry, gathered from disparate sources, some readily available and others rather obscure.²

We who were privileged to study under John in his last years as a full-time professor at Durham are now privileged to assist in bringing this collection to a wider audience. John's scholarship is not only insightful and authoritative, but also a pleasure to read. This is because however skilled he is at elucidating the technical points surrounding the poems he analyses, paying minute attention to detail, he never loses interest in the poetry itself. His continuing fascination is testified to by the extensive revision that has been required to make these articles accurate reflections of his current vision of eddic poetry and the insights he has had on the individual poems in the intervening years. John McKinnell's scholarship is meticulous, perceptive, and humane, but its great feature is that it shows us not merely what is true about literature, but also what is wonderful about it.

John D. Shafer
University of Durham
October 2012

NOTES

- 1 The former is *Studi Anglo-Norreni in Onore di John S McKinnell: 'he hafað sun-dorgecynd,*' ed. Maria Elena Ruggerini with the collaboration of Veronke Szoke (Cagliari: Cooperativa Universitaria Editrice Cagliaritana, 2009), and the latter is *Myths, Legends, and Heroes: Essays on Old Norse and Old English Literature,* ed. Daniel Anlezark (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2011).
- 2 John's other articles on eddic poetry and mythology include 'Norse Mythology and Northumbria: A Response' in *Scandinavian Studies* 59.3 (1987), 325–37, reprinted in *Anglo-Scandinavian England*, ed. J.D. Niles and M. Amadio (Lanham,

New York and London: UP of America, 1989), 41–52; ‘Eddic Poetry in Anglo-Scandinavian Northern England’ in *Vikings and the Danelaw: Select Papers from the Proceedings of the Thirteenth Viking Congress*, ed. J. Graham-Campbell, R. Hall, J. Jesch, and D. Parsons (Oxford: Oxbow, 2001), 327–44; ‘Þórr as comic hero’ in *La Funzione dell'Eroe Germanico: Storicità, Metafora, Paradigma*, Philologia: saggi – ricerche – edizioni, a cura di Teresa Pàroli 2 (Rome: Il Calamo, 1995), 141–83; ‘Why Did Christians Continue to Find Pagan Myths Useful?’ in *Reflections on Old Norse Myths*, ed. by Pernille Hermann, Jens Peter Schjodt, and Rasmus Trandum Kristensen (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007), 33–52; ‘The Ideology of Vengeance in Old Norse Mythology’ in *Peace and Protection in the Middle Ages*, ed. T.B. Lambert and David Rollason (Toronto and Durham: CMRS / PIMS, 2009), 181–94; ‘A Perilous Journey: The Structure, Origins and Theme of *Svipdagsmál*’ in *Stanzas of Friendship: Studies in Honour of Tatjana N. Jackson*, ed. Natalja Yu. Gvozdetskaja, Irina G. Kononova, Elena A. Melnikova, and Alexandr V. Podossinov (Moscow: Dmitriy Pozharsky University, 2011), 223–39; and ‘Heathenism in *Völuspá* – A Preliminary Survey’ in *Essays on Völuspá*, ed. Terry Gunnell; and ‘Useless Knowledge? The Paradox of *Alvíssmál*’ in *Nordic Mythologies: Interpretations, Intersections and Institutions*, ed. Timothy Tangherlini, forthcoming in 2014.

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Essays on Eddic Poetry

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1 *Völuspá* and the Feast of Easter

It is generally agreed that *Völuspá* has been influenced by Christian ideas to some extent, but the nature of that influence has been debated. Of course it is true, as Daniel Sävborg has pointed out,¹ that all the Old Norse poetry that survives comes from a time when Christianity was already to some extent influential in northern Europe. But there is a difference between the adoption of commonplace Christian expressions (such as calling Óðinn *Alfǫðr* ‘Father of all’, cf. Latin *Pater omnium*) or general ideas (e.g. that some beings will be resurrected after Ragnarǫk) on the one hand, and on the other the suggestion that specific Christian texts have been used as source material for *Völuspá*.² This paper will address only the latter type of influence, and will consider what criteria should be used in evaluating whether any particular claimed source is probable or not. I shall then go on to make a suggestion of my own.

I. The Religious Context of *Völuspá*

It is first necessary to consider whether *Völuspá* is genuinely pre-Christian or not. In polytheistic cultures, the measure of acceptance of a monotheistic religion is not whether its god is accepted, for a religious system with many gods can usually find room for a new one without any basic alteration of itself. The real measure of conversion has to be the rejection of all gods except that of the monotheistic religion. We have several examples in Germanic sources of polytheists who also worshipped Christ – men such as the East Anglian King Rædwald or the Icelandic settler Helgi inn magri³ – but they are not real Christians. Despite Rædwald’s temporal success and patronage of King Edwin, Bede dismisses his deeds as ignoble:

Et quidem pater eius Redwald iamdudum in Cantia sacramentis Christianae fidei inbutus est, sed frustra; nam rediens domum ab uxore sua et quibusdam peruersis doctoribus seductus est, atque a sinceritate fidei deprauatus habuit posteriora peiora prioribus, ita ut in morem antiquorum Samaritanorum et Christo seruire uideretur et diis, quibus antea seruiebat, atque in eodem fano et altare haberet ad sacrificium Christi et arulam ad uictimas daemoniorum.

Indeed his father Rædwald had long before been initiated into the mysteries of the Christian faith in Kent, but in vain; for on his return home, he was seduced by his wife and by certain evil teachers and perverted from the sincerity of his faith, so that his last state was worse than his first. After the manner of the ancient Samaritans, he seemed to be serving both Christ and the gods whom he had previously served; in the same temple he had one altar for the Christian sacrifice and another small altar on which to offer up victims to devils.⁴

For the ‘real’ Christian, all heathen gods must be rejected as either the personifications of natural objects or forces, as historical human beings who persuaded others to worship them, or as devils. Good examples of all three attitudes can be found in Ælfric’s *De Falsis Diis*, which dates from around the same time as the most probable date of *Vqluspá* (Ælfric died ca. 1010). Ælfric says that the error of regarding the sun, moon, stars or elements as gods arose after Noah’s flood;⁵ he dismisses *Þór* and *Óðon* as distorted versions of Mars and Mercury, whom he describes as wicked human beings;⁶ and a statue of Apollo which is mastered by Bishop Gregory is said to have been inhabited by a devil who pretended to be the god.⁷ Ælfric is here adapting or expanding material from two of his major sources, the *De Correctione Rusticorum* of Martin of Braga and the *Historia Ecclesiastica* of Rufinus;⁸ but the same tradition continued after his time, and an adaptation of *De Falsis Diis* in Icelandic survives in *Hauksbók*.⁹ Similarly, the Saxon baptismal vow (in an early ninth-century manuscript from Mainz) explicitly lists *Thunaer* and *Uuôden* (Donar/Þórr and Wotan/Óðinn) among the devils who are being renounced:

end ec forsacho allum dioboles uuercum and uuordum, Thunaer ende Uuôden
ende Saxnôte ende allum thêmh unholdum thê hira genôtas sint.

and I forsake all the devil’s works and words, Thunaer and Uuôden and Saxnôt,
and all the fiends who are their companions.¹⁰

It should therefore be no surprise when we find Óláfr Tryggvason requiring his men, poets or not, to reject the old gods and all that they stand for. Perhaps

reluctantly, Hallfreðr vandræðaskáld proclaims his hatred for Óðinn now that he serves Christ; a couple of stanzas later he announces his enmity towards Freyr, Freyja, Njörðr and Þórr, and that he will pray only to Christ and God.¹¹ A similar pressure is exerted by Óláfr (admittedly in a less reliable account) in the *Flateyjarbók* story of how he makes all his men approach the idol of Þorgerðr Hqðabrúðr to see whether any of them has any love for her, before smashing the idol to pieces and burning the fragments.¹² The only remaining role for Óðinn in the sagas of Óláfr Tryggvason is as a sinister visitor, bent on distracting the king from Christian worship and endangering his life while he is in a state of sin.¹³ In all these narratives, the king's and/or the author's point of view seems to be that the old gods are actually devils.

In view of this attitude, it also seems understandable that the skaldic poetry attributed to poets who served the Christian kings of the first half of the eleventh century includes no poems on heathen mythological subjects and few clear allusions to pre-Christian beliefs. In Sigvatr Þórðarson's poetry there is one scornful reference to pre-Christian practice (in *Austrfararvísur* 5,¹⁴ where a Swedish widow uses her Odinism and the fact that an *álfablót* is being conducted as an excuse for disgracefully refusing hospitality). He uses only one or two undeniably heathen kennings: *munvigg Dáins* 'delightful ship of Dáinn' ('poetry'), *lausavísa* 29,2 (Kock I, 130; *Skj.* I B, 253 emends to *munvág Dáins*, 'delightful bay of Dáinn') and probably *Jalks briktpuðr* ('warrior', verse on Erlingr Skjálgsson, line 2; *Skj.* I B, 228; Kock I, 118), which would normally be interpreted 'destroyer of Jalkr's (Óðinn's) partition' (of a shield), though if challenged, Sigvatr might have claimed that it meant 'gelding's partition-destroyer', i.e. 'warrior on horseback'.¹⁵ In Óttarr svarti's poetry I have found no literal allusions to the gods, though there is one clearly mythological kenning (*víf Óska* 'Óski's [Óðinn's] lady' [Jörð, 'earth'], *Óláfsdrápa soenska* 2.4 (*Skj.* I B, 267)). These poets clearly avoided heathen references and kennings wherever possible, except where the traditional diction could be reinterpreted in a non-heathen way.

There is a small group among the lesser-known poets of St. Óláfr who do make overt allusions to the gods, if the verses attributed to them are genuine, and in at least one case this may represent a residual resistance to Christianity. There are surviving fragments of four poems attributed to Hofgarða-Refr,¹⁶ the son of the poetess Steinunn who according to *Kristni saga* ch. 9 composed two scornful *lausavísur* rejoicing that Þórr had wrecked the ship of the missionary Þangbrandr.¹⁷ Refr's mother was therefore regarded as a determined heathen. In two of his own poems, Refr makes a deliberate parade of heathen references: one complete and two half-stanzas of a poem about his fellow-poet and probable mentor Gizurr Gullbráðr include a kenning naming a god in each half-stanza (they are Hárr [=Óðinn], Freyr, Baldr and Gautr [=Óðinn]), as well as

Óðinn's ring Draupnir. The five half-stanzas of Refr's travel-poem include references to Gýmir, Sleipnir and Rán. Gizurr Gullbráðskáld himself is credited with one and a half stanzas, of which the half-stanza includes the names of the valkyries Hlökk and Skoðgul and the battle-kenning *él Yggs* 'Óðinn's blizzard'.¹⁸ Another minor poet in the same circle is Þorfinnr munnr, to whom two *lausavísur* are attributed, one of which includes the battle-kenning *Pundar hregg* 'storm of Pundr (=Óðinn)'.¹⁹

Although they served a Christian king, there are no Christian references in what survives of the work of any of these three poets, and they may all have been covert heathens. It remains an intriguing question why St. Óláfr tolerated these heathen references; Margaret Clunies Ross has helpfully suggested to me the possibility that the most blatantly heathen of them, Refr's poem about Gizurr, may have been tolerated because its main subject is the traditional art of poetry, which Refr had learned from Gizurr.

Despite these exceptions, it remains overwhelmingly the case that the skaldic verse attributed to the first half of the eleventh century avoids referring to the heathen gods, while it abounds in references to Christ, God and other Christian concepts. The first important court poet who makes deliberate (although sparing) use of such references while being obviously a devout Christian is Arnórr jarlaskáld (ca. 1012–after 1073), to whom are attributed four more or less complete *drápur* and fragments of a fifth, as well as eleven other fragments, varying in length from a stanza to a single phrase.²⁰ Arnórr's verse includes many Christian references, and three of his *drápur* (*Rögnvaldsdrápa*, *Þorfinnsdrápa* and *Haraldsdrápa*) end with Christian prayers on behalf of the patron concerned, but there are also about a dozen references to heathen mythology, all of which can be dated to between ca. 1044 and ca. 1065. A number of these are placed at or near the beginnings and ends of poems, so far as they now survive – see the warrior-kenning *Göndlar-Njóðr*, *Rögnvaldsdrápa* 1,3; the sky-kenning *Ymis hauss*, *Magnússdrápa* 19,4; and *Þorfinnsdrápa* 22.²¹ This may suggest that Arnórr is using them as a kind of rhetorical flourish, certainly not as an indication of belief in the pre-Christian gods. As Diana Whaley puts it:

it (Arnórr's pagan-derived diction) lends grandeur and variety, and reminds the skald's audience of his and their illustrious predecessors, but its use cannot be regarded as religious in intention or effect.²²

Arnórr is also responsible for what is probably the earliest reference to *Völuspá*, in the first half of *Þorfinnsdrápa* 22:

Björt verðr sól at svartri,
 sökkr fold í mar dökkvan,
 brestr erfiði Austra,
 allr glymr sær á fjöllum,
 áðr at Eyjum friðri
 - inndröttar – Þorfinni
 - þeim hjalpi goð geymi -
 gœðingr myni fæðask.

The bright sun will turn black,
 earth will sink in the dark sea,
 Austri's burden will break,
 the sea thunder on the fells,
 before in the Isles a finer
 chieftain than Þorfinnr
 (may God help that guardian
 of his retinue) will be born.

This apparently combines echoes of *Völuspá* 57,1–2, 41,5 and possibly 11,3:

Sól tér sortna,
 sígr fold í mar,

The sun will start to darken
 the earth will sink in the sea

Svart var þá sólskín²³

The sunshine was then black

Austri ok Vestri

Eastern and Western.

The combination of echoes from two or three different contexts in *Völuspá* shows that it is Arnórr who is the borrower here and makes it more difficult to maintain that the resemblance is due merely to a chance coincidence of apocalyptic phrases in the two poems.²⁴ In any case, the end of the present Miðgarðr in st. 57 is centrally important in *Völuspá*, while Arnórr is merely indulging in a rhetorical flourish. Even so, the second half of the same stanza, by calling on God to help Þorfinnr, reclaims the subject matter of the first half from the heathen Ragnarøk to the Christian Doomsday.

Þorfinnsdrápa is said to date from ca. 1065, so it seems that *Völuspá* almost certainly existed by then. Less certainly, the poet who composed the list of valkyrie-names in *Völuspá* 30,5–8 seems to have misunderstood the compound *geir-Skögul* 'spear-(carrying)-Skögul' in *Hákonarmál* 12,2,²⁵ since he makes *Skögul* and *Geirskögul* into two separate valkyries. This would suggest that *Völuspá* 30 dates from some time after ca. 962–65, the approximate date attributed to *Hákonarmál*. Unfortunately, st. 30 is not as central to the poem as st. 57, and it appears only in the Codex Regius, not in Hauksbók. It does not therefore prove that the whole of *Völuspá* is later than *Hákonarmál*, although this does seem likely for other reasons. For example, st. 33,7 uses the name *Valhøll* in the specific sense 'Óðinn's residence' which first appears in *Eiríksmál* 1,3 (ca. 955),²⁶ rather than the earlier meaning 'any exotic (southern) hall', as in *Atlakviða* 2,3 and 14,11 (N-K 240, 242).

Sveinbjörn Rafnsson (1999) has suggested that *Völuspá* shows many similarities of detail to Gunnlaugr Leifsson's *Merlínusspá*, the Old Norse translation of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Prophetiae Merlini* (which is part of his *Historia Regum Britanniae*).²⁷ Like *Völuspá*, Gunnlaugr's poem is preserved in Hauksbók, and Sveinbjörn attributes both poems to about the same date (the second half of the twelfth century). He stops short of arguing that *Völuspá* derives these phrases from *Merlínusspá*, but a twelfth-century dating would of course suggest a literate Christian poet and would make the poem's echoes of scripture unremarkable. But most of Sveinbjörn's parallels to *Völuspá* in the text of *Merlínusspá* do not correspond to anything in the *Prophetiae Merlini*, and those that seem significant could easily have been borrowed from *Völuspá*. A good example of this appears in the opening stanza of *Merlínusspá*, where the *spár spakligar* 'wise prophecies' presented by Gunnlaugr's poem may be influenced by the *spiðll spaclig ok spáganda* of *Völuspá* 29,3–4 (N-K 7), but have no counterpart in Geoffrey's Latin. Other parallels adduced by Sveinbjörn are either commonplace or contextually quite unlike the phrases in *Völuspá* with which he compares them. Only one of them seems more interesting; Sveinbjörn compares *Merlínusspá* II 22,7–8 (*Skj.* II B, 28; Kock II, 18) with *Völuspá* 36,1–2 (N-K 8):

Munu dreyrgar ár ór dǫlum falla. (<i>Merlínusspá</i> II 22,7–8)	Á fellr austan um eitrdala (<i>Völuspá</i> 36,1–2)
Bloody rivers will flow down from valleys	A river flows from the east through valleys of deadly cold

This corresponds to Geoffrey's:

Montes itaque eius ut valles aequabuntur, et flumina vallium sanguine manabunt.
(*Historia Regum Britanniae* VII.3, 37–38)²⁸

For Britain's mountains and valleys shall be levelled, and the streams in its valleys shall run with blood.²⁹

But in fact, the differences between *Völuspá* and *Merlínusspá* at this point are more striking than the resemblances. Geoffrey's rivers of blood are a portent of disaster or perhaps a symbol of civil war, whereas the river Slíðr in *Völuspá* (which flows through valleys of deadly cold and has daggers and swords floating in it, neither of which is paralleled in Geoffrey or in *Merlínusspá*) appears to be an instrument of punishment of the wicked men who have to wade in it as it flows through the hall at Náströnd (*Völuspá* 38–39);³⁰ the River Slíðr is also named in *Grímnismál* 28,6 (N-K 63). A dream of a raging river flowing

through a hall is a portent of disaster in *Atlamál* 26 (N-K 251), there is a deadly underworld river swirling with weapons in Saxo's *Gesta Danorum* I.viii.14,³¹ and a deadly cold river petrifies every living thing it touches in *Porsteins þáttur bæjarmagns* ch. 5 (*FSN* III, 404–05). But none of these is composed of blood, and neither are any of the other perilous rivers that I have found in Old Norse myth and legend;³² the deadly cold river swirling with weapons seems to be a native Scandinavian idea, and clearly different from the rivers of blood in *Merlínusspá*.

Overall, the similarities noted by Sveinbjörn seem rather remote, and may reasonably be explained by the fact that both poems are prophetic and that *Merlínusspá* has been naturalised into a pre-existing tradition of vatic and occult poetry in Old Norse.³³ It also seems unlikely that Snorri, the greatest expert of his age on the poetic tradition, would rely so heavily on *Völuspá* in constructing *Gylfaginning* if he knew it to be a recent composition, and equally unlikely that he would be deceived into regarding a poem that had originated within the lifetime of his parents and teachers as a genuine product of the heathen period.

It therefore seems most likely that *Völuspá* was composed either in the late heathen period or in the first half-century or so of Icelandic Christianity. During either of these eras, the evidence of skaldic verse makes it seem unlikely that a Christian would compose a poem on a heathen mythological subject, and even more unlikely that he would depict any of the gods as sympathetic figures. It also seems rather improbable that the poem was composed in the early Christian period by a recalcitrant heathen, since we should hardly expect, in that case, that it would borrow Christian concepts as readily as it seems to.

The poem certainly does borrow some Christian ideas, but sometimes these seem to be either misunderstood or deliberately adapted:

1. The punishment in which the wicked must wade the grievous currents of the River Slíðr in *Völuspá* 39 bears an obvious resemblance to Revelations 21,8:

Sá hon þar vaða þunga strauma
Menn meinsvara oc morðvarga,
Oc þannz annars glepr eyrarúno;

timidis autem et incredulis et exsecratis et homicidis et fornicatoribus et veneficis et idololatrīs et omnibus mendacibus pars illorum erit in stagno ardenti igne et sulphure quod est mors secunda.³⁴

She saw there, wading the grievous currents, lying men and murderers, and him who seduces another man's mate;

But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable and murderers and whoremongers and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, they shall

have their portion in the pool burning with fire and brimstone; which is the second death. (Rev. 21,8)³⁵

However, in *Völuspá* this punishment precedes Ragnarøk and seems to be part of an unsuccessful attempt by the gods to deter the rising tide of wickedness in the world. In Revelations, by contrast, it is part of a symmetrical and eternal justice which comes after the Judgement.

2. The image in *Völuspá* 48,5–7 of the dwarves (who normally live in rocks and the earth) trembling outside their walls of stone is reminiscent of the terror of the powerful on Doomsday in Rev. 6,15–16:

stynia dvergar fyr steindurom.

et dicunt montibus et petris cadite
super nos et abscondite nos a facie
sedentis super thronum

the dwarves groan in front of their
stone doors.

(*Völuspá* 48,5–6, N-K 12)

and they say to the mountains and
rocks: 'Fall on us, and hide us from
the face of him that sitteth upon the
throne' (Rev. 6,16)

But the dwarves apparently leave their normal dwellings for fear of being crushed when the rocks collapse, whereas the mighty in Revelations appeal in vain to the rocks to crush them rather than have to face the terror of the coming Judgement.

3. The earth rising out of the sea for a second time (*Völuspá* 59,1–4) and the hall fairer than the sun which will be inhabited by trustworthy people (*Völuspá* 64) seem almost certainly influenced by the new heaven and earth of Rev. 21,1 and the light in the heavenly city of Rev. 22,5:

Sér hon upp koma qðro sinni
iqrð ór ægi, iðiaagroena;

et vidi caelum novum et terram novam
primum enim caelum et prima terra abiit
et mare iam non est.

She sees rise up for a second time/again
earth from the sea, eternally green;

(*Völuspá* 59,1–4, N-K 14)

And I saw a new heaven and a new earth.
For the first heaven and the first earth
was passed away; and the sea is now no
more. (Rev. 21,1)

Sal sér hon standa sólo fegra,
gulli þacþan, á Gimlé;

et nox ultra non erit et non egebunt
lumine lucernae neque lumine solis

þar scola dyggvar dróttir byggja
oc um aldrdaga ynðis nióta.

quoniam Dominus Deus illuminat illos et
regnabunt in saecula saeculorum.

She sees a hall stand, fairer than the sun,
thatched with gold, at Gimlé;
there bands of trustworthy folk will
dwell
and enjoy bliss for ever.

And night shall be no more: and they
shall not need the light of the lamp, nor
the light of the sun; for the Lord God
shall enlighten them: and they shall reign
for ever and ever. (Rev. 22,5)

(*Völuspá* 64, N-K 15)

However, whereas in Revelations these things cannot happen until after the good and the wicked have been distinguished at the Judgement (Rev. 20,12), in *Völuspá* they can precede the Second Coming (*Völuspá* 65) because the wicked have apparently all perished in Ragnarök. This illustrates an important ‘theological’ difference, namely that the poet of *Völuspá* seems to have no concept that the souls of the wicked are also immortal.

Even if a Christian poet had defied the normal practice of the period by composing a poem on a heathen mythological subject, it seems unlikely that he would have misunderstood or distorted the Christian ideas he also used. On the other hand, this is exactly what we would expect of a heathen poet who had some knowledge of Christianity: he or she might either misunderstand or deliberately adapt the concepts or images that were borrowed. It therefore seems probable that the poet of *Völuspá* was Christian-influenced but not actually Christian. But such a poet would be very unlikely to be literate in the Roman alphabet, or to have had any opportunity to learn Latin. The Christian sources available to him or her would be limited to those that could be received orally in a vernacular language that he or she could understand. Besides Old Norse, he or she would certainly be able to follow orally-delivered texts in Old English,³⁶ and perhaps in Old Saxon³⁷ and (for poets from the Hiberno-Norse area and some Orcadians, Faroese, Icelanders and Greenlanders) also in Old Irish.

Of course it is likely that some Christian works which now survive only in Latin were also at one time translated into or explicated in one or more of these vernacular languages, even if no translations of them survive now. However, the existence of such translations cannot be assumed for any particular text unless there is clear evidence that they may once have existed, and coincidences with *Völuspá* cannot count as such evidence, because that leads to circular argument.

We also need to insist that any work which is held to have influenced *Völuspá* in detail must not have been used only in contexts from which heathens were

excluded. This normally included any religious service in church; and even those under instruction in the faith were excluded from the most sacred parts of the sacraments of baptism³⁸ and the Eucharist. The range of occasions on which heathens were likely to be present at a Christian ceremony, and on which Christian texts might be transmitted to non-Christians, is therefore rather narrow. It follows that texts used on these occasions should be regarded as much more likely to have influenced a poet like that of *Völuspá* than those that were used at other times.

II. Baptism, the Easter Vigil, and the Creation Story

Of the few Christian occasions at which heathens might be present and the vernacular languages were likely to be used, the most obvious is baptism, but since participation in this involved renunciation of heathen gods, a recently baptised convert would be unlikely to compose a poem like *Völuspá* afterwards. But part of the baptism service might also be attended by catechumens, people who were, at least theoretically, under initial instruction in the faith, although there are many known examples of adults who continued in this semi-Christian state for some time.³⁹ In later Old Norse prose texts, this process is referred to as being *primsignaðr* ‘prime-signed’. Although the word does not survive in ON verse, accounts in sagas and *þættir* usually envisage it as necessary for heathens who want to have trading or other friendly relationships with Christian communities. A good example can be seen in *Egils saga* ch. 50, where King Æðelstan of Wessex asks Þórólfr and Egill to allow themselves to be prime-signed:

... því at þat var þá mikill siðr, bæði með kaupmönnum ok þeim mönnum, er á mála gengu með kristnum mönnum, því at þeir menn, er primsignaðir váru, höfðu allt samneyti við kristna menn ok svá heiðna, en höfðu þat at átrúnaði, er þeim var skapfelldast.⁴⁰

... because it was then a common custom, both among merchants and men who entered the service of Christians, since people who were prime-signed had full contact with Christians and also with heathens, but held whatever faith suited them best.

Of course this is only an early thirteenth-century theory about why heathens who had no intention of becoming ‘real’ Christians might agree to be prime-signed, but it is a very believable one. The earliest known record of Scandinavians

becoming catechumens appears in ch. 24 of Rimberty's *Vita Anskarii* (referring to events of the 850's in a port in the region of Slesvig, possibly Hedeby):

Quia libenter quidam signaculum crucis recipiebant, ut catecumini fierent, quo eis ecclesiam ingredi et sacris officiis interesse liceret, baptismi tamen perceptionem differebant, hoc sibi bonum diiudicantes, ut in fine vitae suae baptizarentur, quatinus purificati lavacro salutari, puri et immaculati vitae aeternae ianuas absque aliqua retardatione intrarent.⁴¹

For some people freely accepted the little sign of the cross, so that they might become catechumens, by which means it was allowed for them to enter the church and be present at sacred services, but they put off the enlightenment of baptism, judging that it was good for them to be baptised at the end of their lives, seeing that, purified by that saving bath, pure and spotless, they would (then) enter the gates of eternal life without any delay.⁴²

Since this implies that the catechumens concerned already had a full understanding of orthodox theological ideas about baptism, it may seem rather less credible than the more cynical explanation in *Egils saga*. However, it is also worth noticing that Rimberty takes it for granted that heathens were not allowed to be present at church services *without* being prepared to become catechumens. This makes it unlikely that a heathen would experience other Christian liturgical texts, even in Latin, without previously having gone through the process of becoming a catechumen at the Easter Vigil service. For example, the suggestion that the poet might have heard the *Cantus Sybillae* as part of the Christmas office (assuming that there was someone available to explain what its Latin text meant) would necessarily imply that he had experienced the Easter Vigil service as well.

Although a Norse-speaker at the end of the tenth century might become a catechumen anywhere in northern Europe, many must have done so in England, and surviving liturgical manuscripts from England can give us a good idea of what the experience was like. By good fortune, one of these manuscripts, the Missal of Robert of Jumièges, comes from a religious house in the English Danelaw, most likely either Peterborough or Ely, and was written before 1016.⁴³

Traditionally, the process of induction of catechumens was quite an extended matter. It began on the third Sunday in Lent with the first of seven 'scrutinies', in which candidates were instructed and tested in the language of their choice on the openings of the four gospels, the Creed and the Lord's Prayer, and ended on Holy Saturday with a series of exorcisms and anointing with holy

oil.⁴⁴ However, by the time of the Missal of Robert of Jumièges, the ceremony for making catechumens had been simplified and incorporated into the service which also traditionally included most baptisms, namely the Easter Vigil service on Holy Saturday.⁴⁵ It is made explicit in the Missal that the making of catechumens on Holy Saturday can be expected to include adult converts from paganism, for the prayers for use at the baptism of infants are followed by a section beginning:

ITEM AD CATECUMINUM EX PAGANO FACIENDUM

Gentilem hominem cum susceperis, in primis cateciza eum diuinis sermonibus et da ei monita quemadmodum post cognitum ueritatem uiuere debeat.⁴⁶

ITEM: TO MAKE A CATECHUMEN OUT OF A PAGAN

When you receive a heathen man, first catechise him with holy speeches and give him advice about how he ought to live after understanding the truth.

The Easter Vigil service began in darkness, with the blessing and lighting of the paschal candle from the ‘new fire’, a small fire by the church door which in tenth-century England had already been lit on Maundy Thursday evening.⁴⁷ There is then a series of readings from scripture, each followed by a prayer which relates to it. There were originally ten of these readings,⁴⁸ but in the Missal of Robert of Jumièges, as elsewhere in the later Anglo-Saxon church, there are only four.⁴⁹ The first is Genesis chapter 1, verses 1–19, which is repeatedly paralleled in the opening stanzas of what the *Völuspá* remembers in *Völuspá*:

Ár var alda þat er ekki var, (SnE)
vara sandr né sær né svalar unnir;
iqrð fannz æva né upphiminn,
gap var ginnunga, enn gras hvergi.

In principio ...

terra autem erat inanis et vacua ...

It was in ancient times, when nothing
was,
there was neither sand nor sea nor cold
waves;
no earth existed, nor heaven above,
magic space was void, and no vegeta-
tion. (*Völuspá* 3)

In the beginning ... (Gen. 1,1)

And the earth was void and vacant
(Gen. 1,2)

Áðr Burs synir biððum um ypþo,
þeir er miðgarð mæran scópo;

dixit vero Deus congregentur aquæ
quæ sub cælo sunt in locum unum, et
appareat arida factumque est ita.

Until Burr's sons raised up the lands,
they who created splendid middle
earth; (*Völuspá* 4,1–4)

God also said: 'Let the waters that are
under the heaven be gathered together
into one place, and let the dry land ap-
pear'. And it was so done. (Gen. 1,9)

þá var grund gróin grænum lauki

et ait germinet terra herbam virentem
...

then the ground was overgrown with
green leek. (*Völuspá* 4,7–8)

And said: 'Let the earth shoot forth
green herbs ...' (Gen. 1,11)

Sól varp sunnan, sinni mána,
hendi inni hægri um himiniðður;

dixit autem Deus fiant luminaria in
firmamento caeli ut dividant diem ac
noctem et sint in signa et tempora et
dies et annos ...

The sun moved from the south,
the moon's companion, her right hand
on heaven's rim; (*Völuspá* 5,1–4)

Again God said: 'Be there lights
made in the firmament of the heaven,
to divide the day and the night; and
let them be for signs and seasons, and
days and years ...' (Gen. 1,14)

nótt ok niðiom nqfn um gáfo,
morgin héto oc miðian dag,
undorn oc aptan árom at telia.

appelavitque lucem diem et tenebras
noctem factumque est vespere et
mane dies unus.

to Night and her children they gave
names,
called them morning and midday,
afternoon and evening, to count in
years. (*Völuspá* 6,5–10)

And he called the light Day, and the
darkness Night. And there was eve-
ning and morning, that made one day.
(Gen. 1,5)

Because we are all familiar with the Christian Creation story, it is easy to overlook how remarkable these stanzas are in the context of Norse heathenism. The myth of the creation of the earth from the body-parts of Ymir seems to have been well established: we find it, expressed in closely similar words, in

Vafþrúðnismál 20–21 and *Grímnismál* 40–41, and it is also alluded to by Ormr Barreyjarskáld,⁵⁰ and in the early Christian period by Arnórr jarlaskáld.⁵¹ The *Völuspá* poet must have known this myth, and in the Codex Regius the description of the primal chaos begins with a one-line reference to it, *þar er Ymir bygði* (*Völuspá* 3,2),⁵² but after that it is largely ignored in favour of the Genesis account or something derived from it.

It has been suggested that these correspondences might be mere coincidence, resulting from two independent approaches to the same religious problem, that of describing the Creation.⁵³ I find this suggestion unconvincing, because the coincidence required for it to be true is improbably large. First, all the biblical parallels to the creation story in *Völuspá* occur in the same half-chapter of Genesis.⁵⁴ Second, they appear in a similar though not identical order in both texts. Third, they contribute to a view of the Creation in *Völuspá* which is significantly different from that shared by *Vafþrúðnismál* and *Grímnismál*. Finally, it is possible to propose a simple and credible way in which *Genesis* 1 could have influenced the poet of *Völuspá*.

The only problem with the suggestion that the poet could have heard the Christian creation myth during an Easter Vigil service is the difficulty of knowing how much of the service was explained to catechumens in the vernacular language, but it is probable that a lot of it would have been. There had for centuries been a tradition of asking, at the beginning of sessions of scrutiny of catechumens, ‘In what language do they confess our Lord?’⁵⁵ Another eleventh-century liturgical book from the Danelaw, the Red Book of Darley (now Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, MS 422) includes a baptism service in which all the rubricated instructions to the priest are in Old English.⁵⁶ If this was done for the benefit even of parish priests, it seems likely that the laity who took part in baptisms must have been given a good deal of explanation in the vernacular. The same thing would apply even more strongly to catechumens, who would have more need for such explanations than the established Christians who were the parents and godparents of infants being baptised.

It is even possible that one vernacular prayer explaining this reading actually survives, in the form of the famous *Wessobrunn Prayer* (early ninth century, Bavarian but with Old Saxon and/or Anglo-Saxon influence). This is now best known for its verse lines, some of which have close parallels in *Völuspá* 3:

Ár var alda þat er ecci var, (SnE)
vara sandr né sær né svalar unnir;
iqrð fannz æva né upphiminn
gap var ginnunga, enn gras hvergi.

Dat ero ni uuas noh ufhimil,
noh paum, noh pereg ni uuas,
ni sterro nohheinig, noh sunna ni scein,
noh mano ni liuhta, noh der maræo seo.
Do dar niuuiht ni uuas enteo ni uuenteo,

It was in ancient times, when nothing
was, there was neither sand nor sea
nor cold waves;
no earth existed, nor heaven above,
magic space was void, and no vegeta-
tion. (*Vpluspá* 3)

There was no earth, nor heaven above,
nor tree, nor rock existed,
not a star shone, nor did the sun,
no moon gave light, nor (was there) the
famous sea.
Nothing existed, neither end
nor beginning ... (*Wessobrunn Prayer*
2–6)

However, it is also worth studying the simpler prose prayer with which the *Wessobrunn Prayer* ends:

Cot almahtico, du himil enti erda gauuorahtos enti du mannun so manac coot
forgapi: forgip mir in dina ganade rehta galaupa enti cotan uuilleon, uuistóm enti
spahida enti craft, tiuflun za uuidarstantanne enti arc za piuuisanne enti dinan uuil-
leon za gauurchanne.⁵⁷

Almighty God, you made heaven and earth and you gave so many good things to
men. By your grace, give me right belief and good will, wisdom and foresight and
strength, to resist the devil and to shun evil and to do your will.

This is very similar to the prayer which follows the reading of Genesis 1 in the
Easter Vigil service in the Missal of Robert of Jumièges:

Deus qui mirabiliter creasti hominem. et mirabilius redemisti. da nobis quesumus
contra oblectamenta peccati mentis ratione resistere. ut mereamur ad gaudia ae-
terna peruenire.⁵⁸

God, who marvellously created mankind and even more marvellously redeemed
them, grant, we pray, that we may resist by mental reason the distracting pleasures
of sin, so that we may deserve to reach the eternal joys.

Both prayers have the same detailed structure: ‘God – you made heaven and
earth/ mankind – and gave good gifts/gave redemption – grant me/us – (the moral
qualities needed) to resist the devil/sin – and to do your will/deserve heaven’.
As the prayer in the Missal of Robert of Jumièges follows and elaborates on the
Creation reading in the Easter Vigil service, it becomes likely that the same may
have been true of the prose part of the *Wessobrunn Prayer*. The verse part of that
prayer is generally thought to be older than the prose, but the arguments in sup-
port of this seem uncertain, and even if it is true, the verse section of the prayer

could have been re-used here because of the useful function it served in explaining the biblical passage in the vernacular. If the poet of *Völuspá* heard something of this kind at this point in the Easter Vigil service, that would explain the close phrasal echoes between *Wessobrunn Prayer* 3–6 and *Völuspá* 3.

The other three readings in the Easter Vigil have not influenced the *Völuspá* poet;⁵⁹ but the ceremony of lighting the new fire and the paschal candle may have provided a link with the already-existing *Surtarlogi* ‘Surtr’s fire’ of the heathen Ragnarök (for which see also *Vafþrúðnismál* 50–51, N-K 54–55). The main symbolism of the new fire and the candle lit from it is that of resurrection to new life, but in the Anglo-Saxon liturgies it also has a more aggressive side. Just before the point at which catechumens who were not being baptised were required to leave,⁶⁰ the Missal of Robert of Jumièges has a prayer (also found in the Gelasian Sacramentary) which begins:

Nec te latet satanas imminere poenas imminere tibi tormenta. imminere tibi diem iudicii. diem supplicii. diem qui uenturus est uelut clibanus ardens. In quo tibi atque uniuersis angelis tuis aeternus ueniet interitus.

Be not deceived, Satan: punishment threatens thee, torment threatens thee, the day of judgement threatens thee, the day of punishment, the day which shall come as a burning furnace, when everlasting destruction shall come upon thee and all thine angels.⁶¹

A similar balance between fire as destroyer of evil and as symbol or nourisher of new life can also be seen in the imagery of *Völuspá* 57,5–8 (N-K 14):

geisar eimi
við aldnara,
leicr hár hiti
við himin síalfan.

fire rages
opposite fire (‘nourisher of life’),
lofty heat plays
against heaven itself.

Interestingly, the features of the Easter Vigil service which are echoed in *Völuspá* all appear at the beginning and end of the service as it would have been experienced by a catechumen – just where we might expect images to remain most vividly in the memory of an illiterate poet.

III. Echoes of Doomsday: The Easter Sunday Sermon

When we turn from the poem’s account of the beginning of the world to that of Ragnarök and the rebirth of the new world after it, we are again met by a

mass of specific echoes of the Bible, but this time they are not all drawn from a single chapter of scripture. Passages that are heavily used include the so-called 'little Apocalypse' in Mark 13,7–27 (or less probably the similar passage in Luke 21,10–27), Revelations 21,1–11 and perhaps Revelations 6,14–16, but there are also echoes of Revelations chapters 8, 19, 20 and 22 (see Appendix). Nor do they appear in *Vǫluspá* in any sequential order corresponding to that of the scriptural passages. This suggests that the poet has been influenced by them indirectly, through a single source that combined a number of biblical echoes drawn from different passages of scripture and placed them in an order of its own.

Anyone who became a catechumen at the Easter Vigil service would also, almost as a matter of course, attend the open part of the mass on Easter Sunday, and this would always include a sermon in the vernacular language. Today, we normally expect an Easter Sunday sermon to be based on the story of the Resurrection, and in particular on the announcement of it to the three Maries by the angels in the empty tomb. This is also prominent in the Anglo-Saxon liturgy, as in the famous *Quem quaeritis* dramatic trope in the *Regularis Concordia*,⁶² but in the late tenth and early eleventh centuries there was also an alternative, for it was believed that the Second Coming would also be on Easter Sunday.⁶³

In *Blickling Homily VII*, the Easter Sunday homily in a late-tenth-century southern English collection, there are two main sections, the first concerned with the Harrowing of Hell, the second giving graphic details of the signs which will occur on each of the seven days immediately preceding the Day of Judgement. This manuscript (or perhaps its immediate source) was copied in the year 971, as we learn from another reference to the imminent end of the world in *Homily XI*, for Ascension Day.⁶⁴ *Blickling Homily VII* cannot itself have been an influence on *Vǫluspá*, for the source material for its latter half comes mainly from the apocryphal *Apocalypse of Thomas* rather than from the canonical scriptures, but it does show that eschatological homilies were sometimes used as sermons on Easter Sunday. This provides an obvious means through which the many echoes of particular passages of Mark and Revelations could have reached an illiterate pagan who had no knowledge of Latin.

It seems unlikely that the particular Easter sermon heard by the *Vǫluspá* poet now survives, but it would not be difficult to reconstruct some of its probable contents. If my theory of a pagan poet with a good memory and the experience of a catechumen is correct, we should expect the sermon he heard to include *all* the quotations from scripture relating to Doomsday and the rebirth of a new heaven and a new earth that are echoed in *Vǫluspá*. I have not yet found a homily that does this, but Anglo-Saxon and other early homilists often borrow whole sections from other works of the same kind, and it is not hard to find

homilies which contain major parts of what the *Völuspá* poet might have heard.

A good example can be found in *Vercelli Homily II*, from another late-tenth-century Old English collection; in its longer version this is headed *De Die Iudicii* 'On the Day of Judgement'.⁶⁵ Although it is not specified for any particular day, it would be appropriate to read it on the day on which the Judgement was expected to take place, especially in a society where many seem to have believed that the end of the world was imminent.⁶⁶ One particular passage in this homily is particularly rich in phrases which are echoed in the stanzas of *Völuspá* about the punishment of the wicked and the coming of Ragnarök. In the quotation below, these are placed in italics:

***Vercelli Homily II, A 39–51*⁶⁷**

On þam dæge us bið æteowed
se opena heofon ⁊ engla þrym
 ⁊ *eallwihnta hryre* ⁊ *eorþan forwyrht*,

treowleasra gewinn ⁊ *tungla gefeall*,
 þunorrada cyrm ⁊ *se þystra storm*,

⁊ *þæra liga blæstm*
 ⁊ *graniendra gesceaft* ⁊ *þæra gasta*
*gefeoh*t

⁊ sio grimme gesyhð ⁊ *þa godcundan*
miht

⁊ se hata scur ⁊ *hellwarena dream*
 ⁊ *þara bymena sang* ⁊ se brada bryne
 ⁊ se biþera dæg ⁊ *þara sawla gedal*

⁊ *se deaðberenda draca* ⁊ *diofla*
forwyrð

⁊ se nearwa seap ⁊ se swearta deap
 ⁊ se byrnenda grund ⁊ *se blodiga*
stream

⁊ mycel fionda fyrhto ⁊ *se fyrena ren*
 ⁊ *hædenra granung* ⁊ *hira heriga fyll*,

Phrases in *Völuspá*

en himinn klofnar (52,8)
 troða halir helveg (52,7), sígr fold í
 mar (57,2)

hverfa af himni heiðar stjörnur (57,3–4)
 svart var þá sólskin of sumor eptir
 (41,5–6)

geisar eimi (57,5)
 gnýr allr Jötunheimr (48,3)
 skeggöld, skálmöld / skildir ro klofnir
 (45,7–8)

Þá kómr inn ríki (65,1)

gýgjar hirðir, glaðr Eggþér (42,3–4)
 hátt blæss Heimdallr, horn er á lopti
 (46,5–6)

dreki...berr sér í fjöðrum ... Niðhoggr
 náí (66,2,5,7)

en gífr rata (52,6)
 Þar sá hon vaða / þunga strauma
 (39,1–2)

fellu eitrdropar (38,5)
 Þá kómr Hlínar harmr annarr fram
 (53,1–2)

þá mun Friggjar / falla angan (53,7–8)

*heofonwarena mengo 7 hiora hlaforðes
miht,
7 þæt mycle gemot 7 sio reðe rod
7 se rihta dom 7 þara feonda gestal
7 þa blacan ondwliton 7 bifiendan
word
7 þara folca wop ond se scamienda
here
7 sio forglendrede hell 7 ðara wyrma
gryre.*

On that day we shall be shown
the open heaven and glory of angels
and *all creatures' fall*
and *earth's destruction*,
the faithless ones' struggle and *fall of*
stars,
noise of thunder and *the storm of*
darkness,
and *the blaze of fires*
and *groans of created things*,
and *the fighting of souls*

and the grim sight, and *the divine*
power
and the hot shower,
and *the joy of the hosts of hell*

and *the sound of trumpets*,
and the broad fire
& the bitter day and the separation of
souls
and the death-bearing dragon

and devils' destruction
and the narrow pit and the black death
and the burning earth and *the bloody*
stream
and great fear of devils and *the fiery*
rain

þar skulu dyggvar / dróttir byggja
(64,5–6)

hræðaz allir / á helvegum (47, 5–6)

sá er undinn salr / orma hryggjum
(38,7–8)

and heaven will split (52,8)
men will tread the road to death (52,7)
earth will sink in the sea (57,2)
the bright stars will leave the sky
(57,3–4)

sunshine was black the summer after
(41,5–6)
fire will rage (57,5)
all Giant-world makes a noise (48,3)
axe-age, sword-age, shields are split
(45,7–8)

Then the mighty one will come (65,1)

ogress's herdsman, happy Eggþér
(42,3–4)

loud blows Heimdallr, the horn is aloft
(46,5–6)

the dragon Niðhoggr bears corpses in
his feathers (66,2,5,7)
and ogresses stumble (52,6)

There she saw, wading the grievous
streams (39,1–2)
venomous drops fell (38,5)

and *groaning of the heathen*

Then comes on Hlín's second grief
(53,1–2)

and *fall of their armies*,
the *multitude of heaven's hosts*

then Frigg's delight will fall (53,7–8)
there bands of trusty men will dwell
(64,5–6)

and their Lord's might,
and the great conflict and the cruel cross
and the righteous judgement
and accusations of devils
and *the pale faces and trembling words*

all will be afraid on the roads to Hel
(47,5–6)

and peoples' weeping and the shamed
ones' army

and the glowing hell and *horror of the
serpents*.

That hall is woven from snakes' backs
(38,7–8)

Here it is not only the phrases that are often similar, but also the form (since the sermon is largely in alliterating rhythmic prose) and the atmosphere of head-long panic and chaos. A number of other sentences in the same homily also suggest parallels with individual stanzas in the same sections of *Völuspá*, and also in those about the re-born world. The punishment of the wicked in *Völuspá* 39 singles out oath-breakers, murderers and seducers of other men's wives; *Vercelli Homily II* visualises the sinful soul living in hell:

... in morþre ȝ on mane, in susle ȝ on sare, on wean ȝ on wurmum, betweox dea-
dum ȝ dioflum, ȝ on bryne ȝ on biternesne ȝ on fulnesse ȝ on eallum þam wituþe
dioflu gearwedon fram þære frymþe ... (A 63–67; ed. Scragg [1992], 60)

... in murder and in crime, in torment and in sorrow, in woe and among worms,
among the dead and devils, and in burning and in bitterness and in foulness and in
all the punishments which devils have prepared since the creation ...

The simpler version of the homily then adds an extended warning against pride (A 91–103; ed. Scragg [1992], 62), but the longer one replaces this with warnings against verbal deceit (N 110–29) and sexual sin, especially seduction (N 130–49; ed. Scragg [1992], 63, 65) – the same as the other two sins singled out in *Völuspá* 39.

The sounding of Heimdallr's horn Gjöll in *Völuspá* 46 comes to mind when we read:

In þam dæge beoð blawende þa byman of .iiii. sceattum þyses middangeardes, ȝ
bonne ealle arisað ... (A 12–13; ed. Scragg [1992], 54)

In that day the trumpets will sound from the four corners of this earth, and then all (the dead) will arise ...

The departure of the heavenly bodies from the sky in *Völuspá* 57,1–4 is recalled by:

ʝ on þam dæge gewit sunnan leoht ʝ monan leoht ʝ þa leoht ealra tungla (A, 6–7; ed. Scragg [1992], 52, 54)

and on that day the light of the sun and the light of the moon and the light of all stars will depart.

Towards the end of the homily Christians are urged *sien we snotre ʝ soðfæste* ‘let us be wise and true to our word’ (A 108), and are promised a land *þær bið ece leoht ʝ blis ʝ ece wuldor ʝ ece gefea mid urum dryhtne*, ‘where there is eternal light and happiness and eternal glory and eternal joy with our Lord’ (A 115–16; ed. Scragg [1992], 64). This resembles the *Völuspá* poet’s vision of Gimlé (st. 64),⁶⁸ the hall brighter than the sun where bands of trustworthy people will enjoy bliss for ever. And much earlier in the homily, the Second Coming is mentioned in words that resemble those of *Völuspá* 65:

On þam dæge siteð ure dryhten in his þam myclan mægenþrymme (A 14–15; ed. Scragg [1992], 54)

On that day our Lord will be seated in that great majesty of His.

Another possible echo is the image of the old woman giving birth to Fenrir’s children in the Iron Wood (*Völuspá* 40), which recalls the whore of Babylon in the wilderness, who is the mother of abominations (Rev. 17,3–5). She is sitting on a beast and is drunk on the blood of the saints (Rev. 17,6–7), and this may suggest a parallel with *Völuspá* 41,1–4 (N-K 9):

Fylliz fiqrvi feigra manna,
rýðr ragna siqt rauðom dreyra.

Although this is generally taken to refer to Fenrir and translated ‘He fills himself with the life of doomed people, reddens the sky (lit. “dwellings of the gods”) with red blood’, there is no initial pronoun, and the subject of *Fylliz* might be either Fenrir or the old woman. Equally, its sense could be ‘he/she becomes gorged (*fullr*) with the blood of doomed people’.⁶⁹ Another uncertain parallel may be drawn between the dwarfs groaning outside their stone doors in *Völuspá* 48 and the mighty begging the mountains and rocks to fall on them in Rev. 6,15–16. But there is no evidence that the source sermon was in Old

English – it might equally well have been in Norse or Old Saxon. Simonetta Battista has shown how difficult it can be to distinguish exact sources in conservative and orthodox religious genres where many texts are related to each other and most have not survived.⁷⁰

However, the comparison with *Blickling Homily VII* and *Vercelli Homily II* shows that the *Völuspá* poet could have derived all the poem's echoes of the Christian Doomsday, the punishment of the wicked and the re-born heaven and earth from a single eschatological sermon delivered on Easter Sunday. Similarly, the Easter Vigil service suggests an obvious means whereby the poet might have been influenced by the first chapter of Genesis.

Nonetheless, this is not ultimately a Christian poem. Its basic situation – an encounter between Óðinn and the *völva* – uses and adapts a story-pattern that was probably already present in Norse heathenism, since we find an allusion to it in *Ynglingatal* 3 (*Skj.* I B, 7). Even if we accept every possible scriptural, liturgical and homiletic parallel, only about twenty of the poem's sixty-six stanzas show Christian influence, and those that do are not always understood in a Christian way. However, it seems clear that there are some specific scriptural echoes in the poem, and the experience of a catechumen over the twenty-four hours of the celebration of Easter provides one of the few clear routes by which these could have come about.

Appendix: *Völuspá* and the Apocalyptic Scriptures⁷¹

39. Sá hon þar vaða þunga strauuma
menn meinsvara oc morðvarga,
oc þannz annars glepr eyrarúno;

She saw there, wading the grievous
currents,
lying men and murderers,
and the man who seduces another
man's mate; (*Völuspá* 39,1–6)

40. Austr sat in aldna í lárniði
ok fæddi þar Fenris kindir;

In the east sat the old woman in Iron
Wood
and gave birth there to Fenrir's children;
(*Völuspá* 40,1–4)

41. Fylliz fiörvi feigra manna,
rýðr ragna siqt rauðum dreyra;

She (?) gorges herself on the life-blood
of
doomed people, reddens the gods'
homes with red blood. (*Völuspá*
41,1–4)

45. Bræðr muno beriaz oc at
bõnom verðaz,

timidis autem et incredulis et exse-
cratis et homicidis et fornicatori-
bus et veneficis et idololatrīs et om-
nibus mendacibus pars illorum erit
in stagno ardenti igne et sulphure
quod est mors secunda

But the fearful, and unbelieving, and
the abominable, and murderers, and
whore-mongers, and sorcerers, and
idolators, and all liars, they shall
have their portion in the pool burning
with fire and brimstone; which is the
second death. (Rev. 21,8)

et in fronte eius nomen scriptum
mysterium Babylon magna mater
fornicationum et abominationum
terræ

And upon her forehead a name was
written: 'A mystery: Babylon the
great, the mother of the fornications
and the abominations of the earth'.
(Rev. 17,5)

et vidi mulierem ebriam de san-
guine sanctorum et de sanguine
martyrum Iesu

And I saw the woman drunk with
the blood of the saints, and with the
blood of the martyrs of Jesus; (Rev.
17,6)

tradet autem frater fratrem in mor-
tem et pater filium et consurgunt fi-
lii in parentes et morte adficiunt eos

**muno systrungar sífiom spilla;
hart er í heimi, hórdómr mikill,
sceggöld, scálmöld, scildir ro klofnir,
vindöld, vargöld, áðr veröld steypiz;**

Brothers will fight and slay each other,
kinsfolk will break the bonds of
kinship;
it's harsh in the world, much
wickedness,
an axe-age, a sword-age, shields are
split,
a wind-age, a wolf-age, before the
world falls; (*Völuspá* 45,1–10)

**46. Leica Míms synir enn miqtuðr
kyndiz
at ino gamla Giallarhorni;
hátt blæss Heimdallr, horn er á
lopti,**

Mím's sons are active and the tree of
fate catches fire
at the sound of the ancient horn Gjöll;
Heimdallr blows loudly, the horn is
aloft, (*Völuspá* 46,1–6)

**47. ymr íþ aldna tré, enn iqtunn
losnar;
hræðaz allir á helvegom,
áðr Surtar þann sefi of gleypir.**

The ancient tree groans and the giant
(Loki)
breaks free; all are afraid on the roads
to Hel
before Surtr's kinsman (fire) swallows
it (the tree). (*Völuspá* 47,3–8)

**cum audieritis autem bella et opin-
iones bellorum ne timueritis oport-
et enim fieri sed nondum finis**

And the brother shall betray his
brother to death, and the father
his son; and children shall rise up
against the parents, and shall work
their death. (Mark 13,12)

And when you shall hear of wars
and rumours of wars, fear ye not: for
such things must needs be, but the
end is not yet. (Mark 13,7)

**et primus tuba cecinit et facta est
grando et ignis mixta in sanguine
et missa est in terram Et tertia
pars terrae combusta est et tertia
pars arborum combusta est**

And the first Angel sounded the
trumpet, and there followed hail and
fire, mingled with blood, and it was
cast upon the earth: and the third
part of the earth was burned up, and
the third part of the trees was burned
up. (Rev. 8,7)

**et cum consummati fuerint mille
anni solvetur Satanas de carcere
suo et exhibit et seducet gentes, quae
sunt super quattuor angulis terrae**

And when the thousand years shall
be finished, Satan shall go forth, and
seduce the nations which are over
the four quarters of the earth. (Rev.
20,7)

**48. gnýr allr iǫtunheimr, æsir ro á
þingi;
stynia dvergar fyr steindurom.**

All giant-world resounds, the gods are
in council;
the dwarves groan in front of their
stone doors (*Völuspá* 48,3–6)

**51. fara fífls megir með freca allir,
et vidi bestiam et reges terrae et
þeim er bróðir Býleiptz í for.**

all the forces of the monster travel
with the wolf;
Býleiptz's brother (Loki) is in com-
pany with them. (*Völuspá* 51,5–8)

**52. grióþiǫrg gnata, enn gífr rata,
troða halir helveg, enn himinn
klofnar.**

stony rocks clash, and hags are about,
men tread the road to Hel and heaven
splits. (*Völuspá* 52,5–8)

**57. Sól tér sortna, sígr fold í mar,
hverfa af himni heiðar stiǫrnor;**

The sun grows dark, earth sinks in the
sea,
the bright stars depart from heaven.
(*Völuspá* 57,1–4)

**et dicunt montibus et petris cadite
super nos et abscondite nos a facie
sedentis super thronum**

And they say to the mountains and
the rocks: 'Fall upon us, and hide
us from the face of him that sitteth
upon the throne'. (Rev. 6,16)

**exercitus eorum congregatos ad
faciendum proelium cum illo qui
sedebat in equo et cum exercitu
eius**

And I saw the beast, and the kings
of the earth, and their armies gath-
ered together to make war with him
that sat upon the horse, and with his
army. (Rev. 19,19)

**et caelum recessit sicut liber invo-
lutus et omnis mons et insulae de
locis suis motae sunt**

and the heaven departed as a scroll
when it is rolled together; and every
mountain and island were moved
out of their places. (Rev. 6,14)

**sed in illis diebus post tribula-
tionem illam sol contenebrabitur et
luna non dabit splendorem suum
et erunt stellae de caelo decedentes**

But in those days, after that tribula-
tion, the sun shall be darkened, and
the moon shall not give her light.
And the stars of heaven shall be fall-
ing down (Mark 13,24–25)

**59. Sér hon upp koma qðro sinni
iqrð ór ægi, iðiaqræna;**

She sees rise up for a second time /
again
earth from the sea, eternally green;
(*Vqluspá* 59,1–4)

**62. Muno ósánir acrar vaxa,
bqls mun allz batna, Baldr mun
koma;
búa þeir Hqrð oc Baldr Hroptz
sigtóptir,
vel, valtívar – vitoð ér enn, eða hvat?**

Fields will grow unsown,
every ill will be put right, Baldr will
come;
Hqrð and Baldr, those gods of the slain,
will happily inhabit Hroptz's (Óðinn's)
victorious dwellings – do you know
enough yet, or what? (*Vqluspá* 62)

**64. Sal sér hon standa sólo fegra,
gulli þacpan, á Gimlé;
þar scola dyggvar dróttir byggia
oc um aldrdaga ynðis nióta.**

She sees a hall stand, fairer than the sun,
thatched with gold, at Gimlé;
there bands of trustworthy people will
dwell
and enjoy bliss for ever. (*Vqluspá* 64)

**et vidi caelum novum et terram no-
vam primum enim caelum et prima
terra abiit et mare iam non est**

And I saw a new heaven and a new
earth. For the first heaven and the
first earth was passed away; and the
sea is now no more. (Rev. 21,1)

**et ipse Deus cum eis erit eorum
Deus et absterget Deus omnem
lacrimam ab oculis eorum et mors
ultra non erit neque luctus neque
clamor neque dolor erit ultra quae
prima abierunt**

And God himself with them shall
be their God. And God shall wipe
away all tears from their eyes; and
death shall be no more, nor mourn-
ing, nor crying, nor sorrow shall be
any more, for the former things are
passed away. (Rev. 21,3–4)

**... et ostendit mihi civitatem sanc-
tam Hierusalem descendentem de
cælo a Deo habentem claritatem
Dei et lumen eius simile lapidi pre-
tioso tanquam lapidi jaspidis sicut
crystallum.**

... and he shewed me the holy city Je-
rusalem, coming down out of heaven
from God, having the glory of God,
and the light thereof was like to a
precious stone, as to the jasper stone,
even as crystal. (Rev. 21,10–11)

**et non egebunt lumine lucernæ
neque lumine solis quoniam
Dominus Deus inluminat illos et
regnabunt in saecula saeculorum.**

... and they shall not need the light of
the lamp, nor the light of the sun, for
the Lord God shall enlighten them;
and they shall reign for ever and ever.
(Rev. 22,5)

**65. Þá kómr inn ríki at regindómi,
öflugr, ofan, sá er öllo ræðr.**

Then comes the mighty one to divine
power,
strong, from above, he who rules all.
(*Völuspá* 65; Hauksbók only)

**et tunc videbunt Filium hominis
venientem in nubibus cum virtute
multa et gloria.**

And then shall they see the son of
man coming in the clouds, with great
power and glory. (Mark 13,26)

NOTES

- 1 See especially Sävborg (2003), 445.
- 2 For example, Wolfgang Butt (1969) argues that the description of Ragnarök in the poem is directly derived from the homilies of Wulfstan and from the Old English poem *Judgment Day II*; for eds., see Bethurum (1957), Dobbie (1942), and for critical comment Lindow (1987). Another suggestion would derive the figure of the narrating *völva* in *Völuspá* from one or more Latin versions of the *Cantus Sibyllae*; for recent arguments of this kind, see Dronke (1992), Dronke II, 93–104; Samplonius (2001). A simpler, less detailed suggestion is that the poet may be indebted to particular passages of the Bible, and notably of *Revelations* – see McKinnell and Ruggerini (1994), 123–26, North (2003), and later in this paper.
- 3 *Landnámabók* ch. S218, H184, ed. Jakob Benediktsson (1968), ÍF 1, 250–53.
- 4 Bede, *Historia Ecclesiastica* II, 15, ed. and trans. Colgrave and Mynors (1969), 188–91.
- 5 *De Falsis Diis* 72–98, ed. Pope (1967–68), 680–81.
- 6 *De Falsis Diis* 104–180, ed. Pope (1967–68), 682–86.
- 7 *De Falsis Diis* 572–648, ed. Pope (1967–68), 707–11.

- 8 ed. Pope (1967–68), 670–73; for a full text of Martin of Braga’s work with parallel translation into Italian, see Naldini.
- 9 ed. Finnur Jónsson (1892–96), I, 156–64; see also Taylor (1969).
- 10 From Vatican MS Cod. Pal. 577; see Simek (1993), 276.
- 11 Hallfreðr, *lausavísur* 7, 9; ed. *Skj.* I B, 158–59. For a recent study of these verses which is inclined to accept them as genuine documents of a reluctant conversion, see Whaley (2003).
- 12 *Flateyjarbók, Ólafs saga Tryggvasonar* ch. 326, ed. Sigurður Nordal and others (1944–45), I, 452–54.
- 13 E.g. *Heimskringla, Ólafs saga Tryggvasonar* ch. 64, ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson (1941), ÍF 26, 312–14.
- 14 *Skj.* I B, 221; Kock I, 115.
- 15 This excludes nine kennings where what was traditionally a mythological name could be interpreted as a common noun, e.g. *svörtum Yggs gjóði* ‘to the black sea-eagle of the Terrifier’ (or ‘of terror’), (= raven), *Nesjavísur* 9,5–7 (*Skj.* I B, 219; Kock I, 114); *Gjallar vǫndr* ‘wand of Gjöll’ (or ‘of noise, battle’), (= sword), *Erfridrápa Ólafs helga* 27,3 (*Skj.* I B, 245; Kock I, 127). I have found six similar examples in Óttarr’s poetry, e.g. *Yggs éla linns kennir* ‘instructor of the snake of the Terrifier’s snowstorms’ (or ‘of the snowstorms of terror’), (= sword-wielding warrior), *Hgfuðlausn* 7,1–3 (*Skj.* I B, 269; Kock I, 138); *folk-Baldr* ‘army-Baldr’ (or ‘bold in the army’) (= warrior), *Ólafsdrápa soenska* 6,1 (*Skj.* I B, 267; Kock I, 137). In cases like these, the poet could make use of traditional diction without admitting that he had made any reference to heathen mythology.
- 16 *Skj.* I B, 295–97; Kock I, 150–51.
- 17 *Kristni saga*, ed. Kahle (1905), 27–28; ed. Sigurgeir Steingrímsson, Ólafur Halldórsson and Peter Foote (2003), ÍF 15:2, 24.
- 18 *Skj.* I B, 292–93; Kock I, 149.
- 19 *Skj.* I B, 292; Kock I, 149; see also ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson (1945), ÍF 27, 359.
- 20 See Whaley (1998).
- 21 *Skj.* I B, 305, 315, 321; Kock I, 155, 160, 162–63; ed. Whaley (1998), 113, 123, 128.
- 22 Whaley (1998), 75.
- 23 So Codex Regius, but Arnórr may have known this line of *Völuspá* as *svort verða sólscin* ‘the sunshine will turn black’, the reading of Hauksbók and Snorra Edda (N-K 10).
- 24 This is suggested by Sveinbjörn Rafnsson (1999), 410–11, whose argument that *Völuspá* is indebted to *Merlínusspá* (see below) would fall if *Völuspá* already existed in Arnórr’s time.
- 25 *Skj.* I B, 58; Kock I, 36.
- 26 *Skj.* I B, 164; Kock I, 89.

- 27 For *Merlínusspá*, see *Skj.* II B, 10–45 or Kock II, 6–28; for Geoffrey of Monmouth, see ed. Hammer (1951), trans. Thorpe (1966).
- 28 Ed. Hammer (1951), 124, lines 37–38.
- 29 Trans. Thorpe (1966), 149.
- 30 It bears an obvious resemblance to the punishment of the wicked in *Revelations* 21,8.
- 31 Ed. Friis-Jensen and trans. Zeeberg (2005), I, 124–25; trans. Davidson and Fisher (1979–80), I, 31.
- 32 See e.g. *Vafþrúðnismál* 16 (N-K 47); Snorri Sturluson, *Gylfaginning* ch. 34, ed. Faulkes (1982), 29; Snorri Sturluson, *Skáldskaparmál* ch. 18 (including Eilífr Goðrúnarson's *Þórsdrápa*), ed. Faulkes (1998), I, 25–28; Saxo VII.xi.2–3, ed. Friis-Jensen and trans. Zeeberg (2005), I, 444–47, trans. Davidson and Fisher (1979–80), I, 228–29; *Vilhjálmss saga sjóðs* chs. 23–25, ed. Loth (1964), 52–61.
- 33 Stefanie Würth (2003), 223 and 227–28, Karl G. Johansson (2005), 97, 108–09, and Gísli Sigurðsson (2007), 528, the only other scholars I know of who have discussed Sveinbjörn's argument, seem also to incline towards this view.
- 34 For quotations from the Vulgate in this paper, see Weber et al. (1975).
- 35 All English translations of biblical passages are taken from the Douai-Rheims translation of the Vulgate.
- 36 On the large measure of mutual comprehensibility between OE and ON, see Townend (2002).
- 37 It is probable, at least, that the name *Muspell* (*Vǫluspá* 51,2, N-K 12) is derived from the German *mu(d)spilli* 'Doomsday', perhaps in its Old Saxon form. As the occurrence of this word in *Vǫluspá* is the earliest surviving example of it in ON, it is possible that the poet took it direct from a German source.
- 38 For the exclusion of non-Christians from the actual ritual of baptism, see *Ordo Romanus XI*, 72, ed. Andrieu (1971), 441; trans. Whitaker (1970), 201.
- 39 See Bedingfield (2002), 177–80; his examples include King Edwin of Northumbria (who arranged for a wooden church to be built between being made a catechumen and being baptised), King Cyneigils of Wessex, and St. Martin of Tours, who according to his legend was a catechumen for eight years.
- 40 Ed. Sigurður Nordal (1933), ÍF 2, 128.
- 41 Rimbertyus, *Vita Anskarii* ch. 24, ed. Trillmich, revised Buchner (1961), 80–83. Further see Molland (1968).
- 42 See also trans. Robinson (1921).
- 43 Bedingfield (2002), 15–16; *The Missal of Robert of Jumièges*, ed. Wilson (1896), Introduction xxiv–xxvi.
- 44 See e.g. the Gelasian Sacramentary 1.26–36, ed. Mohlberg, Eizenhöfer, and Siffrin (1968), 32–53; trans. Whitaker (1970), 166–79.
- 45 For the tradition, see Bedingfield (2002), 175; for the full Easter Vigil service, see *The Missal of Robert of Jumièges*, ed. Wilson (1896), 90–102.

- 46 Ed. Wilson (1896), 101.
- 47 On the lighting of the paschal candle, see the *Regularis Concordia*, ed. and trans. Symons (1953), 39, drafted in Winchester ca. 975 for the use of regular Benedictine monasteries and nunneries. It is not, however, certain that the new fire was always kept burning from Maundy Thursday until Holy Saturday, and the *Missal of Robert of Jumièges* refers to its flames only in passing, towards the end of the prayer of dedication of the candle (ed. Wilson [1896], 90).
- 48 See e.g. the Gelasian Sacramentary 1.43, ed. Mohlberg, Eizenhöfer, and Siffrin (1968), 70–72; trans. Whitaker (1970), 184–85.
- 49 Ed. Wilson (1896), 92–93; cf. also *Regularis Concordia*, ed. and trans. Symons (1953), 47.
- 50 Ormr Barreyjarskáld, *lausavísa* 2; *Skj.* I B, 135; Kock I, 74.
- 51 *Magnússdrápa* 19,4; *Skj.*, I B, 315; Kock I, 160.
- 52 However, since *Snorra Edda* may be an older and superior witness to the text of individual stanzas, we should perhaps prefer its version of *Völuspá* st. 3, which does not mention Ymir at all.
- 53 This suggestion was made in a paper by Henning Kure which was delivered at the Twelfth International Saga Conference in Bonn in July 2003, though he did not include it in the conference preprint, for which see Kure (2003).
- 54 Kees Samplonius (2003) argues convincingly against the view that the creation of Askr and Embla from trees in stt. 17–18 of *Völuspá* reflects the Christian idea that human beings were created in the likeness of God; but in any case, the scriptural verse from which this might have been derived (Genesis 1.26) is not part of the reading in the Easter Vigil service.
- 55 Gelasian Sacramentary, Scrutiny of the Creed; ed. Mohlberg, Eizenhöfer, and Siffrin (1968) 48; trans. Whitaker (1970), 175–76.
- 56 This manuscript has been associated with a parish context in Derbyshire – see Bedingfield (2002), 13–14; for texts of the Old English rubrics, see Page (1978).
- 57 Ed. Schlosser (1998), 44, from MS Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibl. Clm 22.053.
- 58 Ed. Wilson (1896), 92.
- 59 They are Exodus 14,24–15,1 (the drowning of the Egyptians in the Red Sea); Isaiah ch. 4 (a prophecy of Mount Zion); and Isaiah 54,17–55,2 (the invitation to come and eat and drink without money); ed. Wilson (1896), 92–93; the same passages appear in the *Regularis Concordia*, ed. and trans. Symons (1953), 47.
- 60 For this provision, see the Gelasian Sacramentary, ed. Mohlberg, Eizenhöfer and Siffrin (1968), 68; trans. Whitaker (1970), 183; cf. *Ordo romanus* XI, sec. 88, ed. Andrieu (1971), 444; trans. Whitaker (1970), 202–03.
- 61 Ed. Wilson (1896), 96–97; cf. Gelasian Sacramentary, ed. Mohlberg, Eizenhöfer and Siffrin (1968), 67; trans. Whitaker (1970), 183.

- 62 *Regularis Concordia*, ed. and trans. Symons (1953), 49–50; cf. also Bevington (1975), 27–28, and for the development of this trope in the western church as a whole see Young (1933), I, 201–38.
- 63 ... þæt nænigne tweogan ne þearf þæt seo wyrd on þas ondweard tid geweorþan sceal, þæt se ilc[a] Scyppend gesittan wile on his domsetle ‘so that there is no need for any doubt that Doomsday will happen at this present season, when the Creator in person will sit on his judgement-seat’ (*Blickling Homily VII*, ed. Morris [1967], 83).
- 64 *Ponne sceal þes middangeard endian & þisse is þonne se mæsta dæl agangen, efne nigon hund wintra & lxxi. on þys geare.* ‘Then this world must come to an end, and the major part of this (age) has now passed, that is 971 winters in this year’ (*Blickling Homily XI*, ed. Morris [1967], 116–19).
- 65 *The Vercelli Homilies*, ed. Scragg (1992), 48–69. The Vercelli MS preserves the shorter version of this homily, while versions of the longer one survive in four different MSS. These are all slightly different from each other in content, and brief extracts of it are also found interpolated into two other homilies (see ed. Scragg [1992], 48–51).
- 66 Despite a learned insistence, following St. Augustine, that the time of the world’s end was impossible to predict, missionaries and preachers to the laity seem to have made increasing use of this belief as the thousand years since Christ’s incarnation or resurrection approached; see Kick (2006).
- 67 Ed. Scragg (1992), 56, 58.
- 68 Richard North suggests that *Gimlé* in *Völuspá* 64 contains the Old English name-elements *gim* ‘jewel’ and *leah* ‘clearing’, which would parallel the Heavenly City of Rev. 21,10–11, whose light is like that from a precious stone (North [2003], 408–09).
- 69 In Danish, the adjective *fuld* can also mean ‘drunk’ (and cf. also Scots *fou* ‘drunk’), which would make the parallel even closer, but this sense does not seem to be recorded in ON, although the meaning ‘full (of food)’ is relatively common.
- 70 Battista (2003), 31.
- 71 For the relevant parts of *Völuspá*, see N-K 9–15; for the quotations from the Vulgate Bible, see Weber et al. (1975), II, 1597–98, 1889, 1898, 1902–05.

2 On *Heiðr* and *Gullveig*¹

I. Who is *Heiðr* in *Völuspá*?

Þat man hon folcvíg fyrst í heimi,
er Gullveigo geirom studdo
oc í hǫll Hárs hána brendo;
þrysvar brendo, þrysvar borna,
opt, ósialdan, þó hon enn lifir.

Heiði hana héto, hvars til húsa kom,
vǫlo velspá, vitti hon ganda;
seið hon kunni, seið hon leikin;
æ var hon angan illrar brúðar. (*Völuspá* 21–22)²

She remembers a killing between peoples, the first in the world,
when they propped up Gullveig with spears,
and in the hall of Hárr they burned her;
three times they burned her, three times reborn,
often, not seldom, and yet she still lives.

They called her *Heiðr*, wherever she came to houses,
a prophetess foretelling good fortune, she laid spells on spirits;
she understood magic, practised magic in a trance;
she was always the delight (literally ‘fragrance’) of an evil bride.

The interpretation of these two stanzas constitutes one of the most familiar problems in the study of eddic poetry. Most of the critics who have dealt with

it have been mainly concerned to elucidate the enigmatic figure of *Gullveig*, and since the work of Karl Müllenhoff (1883) and Sigurður Nordal (*Völuspá* 1978) the majority view has been that she is a quasi-allegorical figure associated with the *Vanir*, that the *Æsir* burn her in Óðinn's hall in an attempt to exorcise the greed for gold which she represents, but that this merely leads to her being reborn as the *völva* *Heiðr*, whose name is usually thought to derive either from the adjective *heiðr* 'bright' or from the related neuter noun *heið* 'brightness (of the sky)'. The attack on her then leads indirectly to the war between the two races of gods, hence to the destruction of the fortress-wall of the *Æsir*, the employment and betrayal of the Giant Builder, and thus to the moral fall of the gods and the confrontation with the giants which ends at *Ragnarök*.

It is a powerful and elegant interpretation which enables us to see the whole poem as a structure combining logical clarity with moral force. But for that very reason, it may be worth revisiting the evidence for it: might it have been accepted, perhaps, more because of the elegance of the construct than because of any independent evidence in its favour? And even if it is elegant, it leaves two problems unsolved. First, it does not explain how the burning of *Gullveig* and her reincarnation as *Heiðr* leads the *Æsir* to attack the *Vanir*, rather than vice-versa (a revenge attack on the *Æsir* by the *Vanir* would have been more understandable). Second, if the defining vices of the gods are oath-breaking and murder (in the killing of the Giant Builder, *Völuspá* 26) and greed for gold (in the *Gullveig* episode), it seems odd that evil men are later punished for oath-breaking, murder and – not the greed for gold, as we might expect, but the seduction of other men's wives (*Völuspá* 39,1–6); the parallel is so nearly perfect that we should perhaps question whether we have understood the point of the *Gullveig* story correctly.

However, I shall leave *Gullveig* aside for the moment and concentrate on *Heiðr*: can we trust the interpretation of her name as 'bright', and is she really the re-born *Gullveig*? The dative singular form of the name that appears in *Völuspá* 22,1 is *Heiði*, while that of the noun meaning 'brightness' is *heið*, the strong dat.sg. fem. of the adjective is *heiðri*, and the weak dat.sg.fem. is *heiðu*.³

A second conceivable derivation of the name might be from the masculine noun *heiðr* 'honour', 'praise' and the related feminine noun *heið* 'payment', 'fee'. This may be semantically less incongruous than it seems: when *Loki* disguises himself as an old magic-working woman in *Gylfaginning* ch. 49, he adopts the equally curious name *Þökk* (apparently meaning 'Thanks'; ed. Faulkes (1982), 48; trans. Faulkes (1987), 51); and *völur* seem always to have been paid for their services (see below). However, this interpretation is also found wanting grammatically: the dat.sg. of *heiðr* 'honour' ought to be *heiðri*, and that of *heið* 'payment' should be *heið*.

Heiði is, however, the dat.sg. of the feminine noun *heiðr* ‘heath’; since this is probably semantically related to the adjective *heiðinn* ‘heathen’, it seems an appropriate name for a heathen prophetess.⁴ Of course it is possible that early audiences may also have adopted some of the implications of one or all of these near homonyms as secondary connotations, but in purely grammatical terms, the primary meaning of the name *Heiðr* seems to be ‘heath’.

There is an apparent ambiguity in the first couplet of st. 22:

Heiði hana héto hvars til húsa kom,

They called her *Heiðr* wherever she came to houses

since the pronoun *hana* may either refer back to the feminine subject of the end of st. 21 (i.e. *Gullveig*), or it may, as Hermann Pálsson has suggested (*Völuspá*, ed. [1994], 60), be part of the larger pattern whereby the *völva* who is the narrator of the poem opens a number of stanzas by referring to herself in the third person. The first example of this is the opening of st. 21:

Pat man hon fólcvíg fyrst í heimi,

She remembers that first slaying among peoples in the world

but it can also be seen at the beginnings of stt. 27, 28, 29, 30, 35, 38, 39, 59 and 64, and at two other highly significant moments: introducing the theme of *Ragnarøk* (44,5), and when the *völva* sinks down at the end of her prophecy (66,8). The reciting *völva* does not always refer to herself in the nominative case: in the opening of st. 29 she unambiguously uses a dative construction:

Valði henni Herföðr hringa oc men.

Herföðr (i.e. Óðinn) chose rings and necklace for her.

Nor can we appeal to the moral force and clarity of the poem’s structure and outlook as seen by Müllenhoff and Nordal; that would be circular argument, since their view depends in part on the interpretation of this crux. On purely grammatical grounds, it seems most likely that the name *Heiðr* means ‘heath’, and she might be either the re-born *Gullveig* or the narrator of the poem.⁵ To decide which interpretation is more probable in cultural terms, we must look at other examples of the name *Heiðr* in Old Norse literary texts, since these may give us a clue about who the poem’s early audiences assumed *Heiðr* to be.

II. *Heiðr* Elsewhere

The name *Heiðr* appears in one other context in Old Norse poetry, in *Hyndluljóð* 32:

Haki var Hvæðno hóti beztr sona,
enn Hvæðno var Hjórvardr faðir,
Heiðr oc Hrossþjófr Hrímnis kindar.

Haki was somewhat the best of Hvæðna's sons,
But Hjórvardr was Hvæðna's father,
Heiðr and Hrossþjófr (were) Hrímnir's children.

Probably because of the conventional identification of *Heiðr* with Gullveig, *LP* (236) and Simek (1993, 135) treat *Heiðr* here as an otherwise unrecorded name of a male giant, though Sijmons and Gering refer to *Heiðr* and Hrossþjófr as 'geschwister', 'brother and sister' (SG III.i, 391).⁶ *Hyndluljóð* 32 is clearly concerned with the kindred of giants of both sexes (since Hrímnir is a well-known male giant-name and Hvæðna is undoubtedly female); the long lists of male names of giants in *Pulur IV b, f* (*Skj.* I B, 658–60; Kock I, 323–25; *Skáldskaparmál*, ed. Faulkes [1998], I, 110–14) do not include the name *Heiðr*, although most of the other names in this stanza do appear.⁷

This section of *Hyndluljóð* has clearly been influenced by *Völuspá*, so much so that it (or perhaps the whole of *Hyndluljóð*) is referred to by Snorri (*Gylfaginning* ch. 5) as *Völuspá in skamma* (ed. Faulkes [1982], 10, 176; trans. Faulkes [1987], 10).⁸ There is no reason to think that *Heiðr* here is a different figure from the one in *Völuspá*. Hrímnir is a common giant-name, and Hrossþjófr is probably to be connected with the Lappish soothsayer Rostiophus, who in Saxo's *Gesta Danorum* III.iv.1 prophesies to Othinus that Rinda will bear him a son who will avenge the killing of Balderus.⁹

This association with magical prophecy is reinforced by the opening of the next stanza of *Hyndluljóð*:

Ero vǫlur allar frá Viðólfi (*Hyndluljóð* 33,1–2)

All prophetesses derive from Viðólfr.

This link may derive from the fact that *Heiðr* was a traditional name for a *völva*; and the name *Viðólfr*, which appears nowhere else, can most obviously be interpreted as 'forest wolf' (SG III.i, 392 'lupus silvaticus'), which would

be a ‘wild nature’ name similar to *Heiðr* ‘heath’. However, Viðólfur may be the same figure as Vitolfus, a retired warrior and magic-worker who heals the wounds of Haldanus and magically conceals his own house from the pursuing forces of Haldanus’s enemy in Saxo, *Gesta Danorum* VII.ii.2.¹⁰ This name is probably to be derived from *vitt* ‘magic’ (in verse only in the phrase *vitta vétr* ‘magic-working creature’, referring to *vǫlur* in *Ynglingatal* 3,3 and 21,3; *Skj.* I B, 7, 11; Kock I, 4, 7), and *vitta* ‘to enchant’ (in verse only in *Völuspá* 22,4), which perfectly describes the role of Vitolfus.¹¹

The poet of *Völuspá in skamma* clearly thought of *Heiðr* as a *vǫlva* of giant ancestry, and this would link her, not to Gullveig, but rather to the narrator of *Völuspá*, who says that she remembers the giants who gave birth to her or brought her up:

Ec man iǫtna, ár um borna,
þá er forðom mic fædda hǫfðo (*Völuspá* 2,1–4)

I remember giants, born of old,
who had given birth to me (or ‘brought me up’) long ago.

Of course, it is possible that this may be a misinterpretation of *Völuspá* 22, but at our distance of centuries we are in no position to assert this; without evidence to the contrary, we should rather assume that the poet of *Hyndluljóð* understood *Völuspá* correctly.

In prose sources, *Heiðr* is a familiar name for a *vǫlva*, and examples of it appear in:

Qrvar-Odds saga ch. 2 (*FSN* I, 286–89; for a discussion, see Quinn [1998], 34–36);

Hrólfs saga kraka ch. 3 (*FSN* II, 9–10);

Landnámabók (ed. Jakob Benediktsson (1968), ÍF 1, 216–19);¹²

Hauks þáttur hábrókar in *Flateyjarbók* (ed. Sigurður Nordal et al., [1944–45], II, 66–69);

Friðþjófs saga (longer version), ch. 5 (ed. Ludvig Larsson [1901], 14).¹³

These stories share a number of major features besides the name of the *vǫlva*:

1. *Heiðr* is typically a peripatetic *vǫlva* who is invited to prophesy at feasts (*Qrvar-Odds saga*, *Hrólfs saga kraka*, *Landnámabók*); this may explain the line *hvars til húsa kom* (*Völuspá* 22,2). The only *Heiðr* who does not

prophesy is one of a pair of *seiðkonur* in *Friðþjófs saga* who try to destroy the hero and his men by raising a storm at sea.

2. She may be of an alien origin connected with the far north – a Lapp (*Vatnsdæla saga*) or a giantess (*Hauks þáttur* and cf. *Hyndluljóð*). If Heiðr is the narrator of *Völuspá*, she has already claimed to have been *fædda* ('brought forth' or 'brought up') by ancient giants; and *Heiðreikr* (possibly 'heath-wanderer', cf. *reika* 'to wander') appears as a male giant-name in Eilífr Goðrúnarson's *Pórsdrápa* 18,2 (*Skj.* I B, 143; Kock I, 78; Faulkes [1998], I, 29), a poem which may be roughly contemporary with *Völuspá*.
3. The prophecies or spells are delivered from a high platform (*Hrólfs saga*, *Vatnsdæla saga*, *Friðþjófs saga*) and are preceded by a seizure in which Heiðr opens her mouth wide and gasps for breath (*Hrólfs saga*, *Hauks þáttur*); sometimes the hidden information is gathered at night (*Qrvar-Odds saga*). These features are not explicit in *Völuspá* (though the *völva*'s 'sitting out' in st. 28 probably implies that it is night), but they could easily be imagined in it.
4. The prophecies may be a 'song' which comes into Heiðr's mouth from elsewhere (*Qrvar-Odds saga*, *Hrólfs saga*), in which case she alludes in the verse to her own faculty of 'seeing', and may refer to herself either in the first person (*Hrólfs saga*) or in both first and third persons (*Qrvar-Odds saga*). Similarly, in *Völuspá* the prophecies clearly represent an external truth, and the narrating *völva* refers to herself in both the first and the third persons.
5. The prophetess is paid with gifts, which may include a gold ring (*Hrólfs saga*, *Hauks þáttur*, though in the former the ring is given in an attempt to stop Heiðr's revelations); similarly, Óðinn presents the speaking *völva* with *hringa ok men* (*Völuspá* 29,2).
6. The story in *Hrólfs saga* suggests that once the questioner has employed the correct procedure, Heiðr may be unable to stop her prophecy unless she can escape from the questioner's presence, or at least from the prophecy platform. In the same way, the narrating *völva* in *Völuspá* is apparently forced to speak when Óðinn looks her in the eye (*Vsp.* 28,4), and to go on speaking until he releases her.
7. There is usually a powerful hostility between Heiðr and her male hearer, who may wish to defy his future or remain ignorant of it, and may attack or threaten her (*Qrvar-Odds saga*, *Hrólfs saga*, *Vatnsdæla saga*). We should probably assume a similar hostility between Óðinn and the narrating *völva* in *Völuspá*, though in this case, as in *Hrólfs saga*, he is forcing her to speak rather than trying to prevent her.

8. Heiðr sometimes prophesies her hearer's death (*Qrvar-Odds saga*, *Hrólfs saga*), as the narrating *vǫlva* in *Vǫluspá* prophesies that of Óðinn (*Vǫluspá* 53,7–8).
9. Heiðr's prophecies always come true; this must also be assumed to be the case in *Vǫluspá*.
10. In *Landnámabók*, *Vatnsdæla saga* and possibly *Hauks þáttr* Heiðr seems to be connected with (or opposed to) the cult of Freyr, though she is never one of the Vanir herself. I shall return to the significance of this for the figure of Heiðr in *Vǫluspá*.
11. Outside *Vǫluspá*, Heiðr is never said to be a re-born version of someone else, nor is she associated with brightness.¹⁴

It seems, therefore, that nearly all the features traditionally associated with the name Heiðr are obviously borne out in what we are told about the narrating *vǫlva* in *Vǫluspá*. The fact that some of them also appear in stories about *vǫlur* with other names is not important for this argument: the point is that they recall other parts of *Vǫluspá* besides stt. 21–22. Of course it is true that all the other sources I have looked at are later than *Vǫluspá*, and one might argue that they have all used this famous poem in creating a traditional character for the name; but even if this were so, it would be rash to assume that they had all misunderstood the poem, and in the same way. The balance of likelihood must be either that *Vǫluspá* and the other sources all draw on a pre-existing tradition, or else, if it really is the source for all the others, that they understood it correctly, and consequently that Heiðr is the narrator of the poem rather than the re-born Gullveig.

III. Heiðr and Her Sisters

The majority of names associated with *vǫlur* and *seiðkonur* in Old Norse prose sources are conventional two-element female names which are also used for women who have no association with magic, and they probably have no particular significance.¹⁵ However, there are some other single-element names besides *Heiðr* which are particularly associated with magic-working women:

1. *Busla* (in *Bósa saga* chs. 2, 5; *FSN* II, 467, 472–73) is the foster-mother of the hero Bósi; she confronts the hostile King Hringr, and chants a poem against him, in which she threatens him with various disasters if he refuses to give up his hostility towards Bósi and Herrauðr. She refers to herself mainly in the first person, but also once in the third person (by her name); she ends with a question:

eða viltu þulu lengri?

or do you want a longer list?

which strongly recalls the second refrain of the *vǫlva* in *Vǫluspá*:

vitoð ér enn, eða hvat?

do you know enough yet, or what?

The name *Busla* may be connected with the poetic verb *bysja* ‘to gush’ (past tense *busti*), which generally refers to the flow of blood or tears. I have not found any other example of it.

2. The name *Gríma* is used of three different magic-making women, one in *Laxdæla saga* chs. 35–37 (ed. Einar Ól. Sveinsson [1934], ÍF 5, 95–107) and two in *Fóstbræðra saga* chs. 9–10, 23 (ed. Björn K. Þórolfsson and Guðni Jónsson [1943], ÍF 6, 161–69, 242–48); it is also the name of a troll-woman (*Pula* IV c 1,6; *Skj.* I B, 659; Kock, I, 324; *Skáldskaparmál*, ed. Faulkes [1998], I, 112), but there is also one woman in *Landnámabók*, Gríma Hallkelsdóttir, who is not said to be associated with magic (ed. Jakob Benediktsson [1968], ÍF 1, 83, 108–10). The name is linked to the noun *gríma* ‘mask’, ‘cowl’ (in poetry also ‘night’).
3. *Gróa* is one of the commonest names for a *vǫlva*, and is the only one of this group which is also relatively common as a non-magical female name.¹⁶ In *Svipdagsmál* 1–16 (SG I, 196–200), Gróa is awoken from the dead to chant nine protective *galdrar* over her son. Another mythological Gróa begins to extract the fragment of Hrungrnir’s whetstone from Þórr’s head in *Skáldskaparmál* ch. 17 (ed. Faulkes [1998], I, 22; trans. Faulkes [1987], 79–80).¹⁷ A more sinister Gróa in *Göngu-Hrólfs saga* ch. 2 (*FSN* II, 362–63) fosters the foundling Grímr and teaches him her magic. In *Vatnsdæla saga* ch. 36 (ed. Einar Ól. Sveinsson [1939], ÍF 8, 95–96), Gróa has supernatural foreknowledge of her own fated death. Saxo’s Gróa (*Gesta Danorum* Book I, iv.2–12),¹⁸ is not a *vǫlva*, but has strong giant associations; she is wooed by King Gram, partly through his champion Bessus, in a sequence of verse reminiscent of *Skírnismál*. The name Gróa is obviously derived from the verb *gróa* ‘to grow’.
4. *Hulð* is a *seiðkona* and *vǫlva* in Finnmark in Snorri’s *Ynglinga saga* chs. 13–14 (ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson [1941], ÍF 26, 29–31); she is not named in either of the two stanzas of Þjóðólfr’s *Ynglingatal* which are quoted in these chapters, but is referred to as *vitta véttir* ‘magic-working

creature' and *trollkund* 'related to trolls' (*Ynglingatal* 3; *Skj.* I B, 7; Kock I, 4). She may also have been the central figure of a lost *Huldar saga*, about a *trollkona mikil*, which Sturla Þórðarson recited before the court of King Magnús Hákonarson in Bergen in 1263 (*Sturla þáttir* ch. 2; *Sturlunga saga* [1946], II, 232–33). She has also been linked to the German fairytale figure of Holda or Frau Holle (Mother Winter),¹⁹ but her name is related to the verb *hylja* 'to conceal' (past participle *huliðr* or *huldr*), and seems to mean 'Hidden'.

5. *Hyndla*, the wise giantess of *Hyndluljóð*, is called upon to give esoteric information, some of it about the future (*Hyndluljóð* 42–44). Like Busla and the narrating *völva* in *Völuspá*, she challenges her hearer in one of her refrains:

viltu enn lengra?

do you want still more? (*Hyndluljóð* 17,8; 18,10; 34,4; 36,4; 39,4)

The name means 'little bitch' (SG III,i, 369; *LP* 305) and may have had giant associations (cf. the giant-name *Hundalfr* in *pula IV f* 3,2; *Skj.* I B, 660; Kock, I, 325);²⁰ it also appears as a common noun in *Mariu saga* (ed. Unger [1871], 494), where the little bitches symbolise *þarflausar hugsanir* 'idle thoughts'.

Nearly all these names seem to be connected either with wild nature or with concealment, and a derivation of *Heiðr* from *heiðr* 'heath' (i.e. uncultivated and remote upland) therefore seems more likely than one which connects the word to brightness or to honour; this is also borne out by the grammatical declension of the name (see above).

This survey has suggested that these names of *völur* carried a number of expectations for medieval audiences. They apparently implied an old woman, often of giant or Lappish origin, and Hermann Pálsson has suggested that the narrator (and he thinks also the poet) of *Völuspá* is herself one of the Sámi. I think this unlikely; of all the *völur* considered above, only *Heiðr* in *Vatnsdæla saga* (but not in the same story in *Landnámabók*) is said to be Lappish, and this may be influenced by the male Lappish enchanters whom Ingimundr employs in the attempt to find his silver Freyr image. *Hulð* in *Ynglinga saga* apparently lives in Finnmark, but her ethnic origin is not stated. Against this, *Heiðr* is a giantess in *Hyndluljóð* and apparently also in *Hauks þáttir*; *Gríma* is a troll-woman in the *pulur*; *Gróa* in *Skáldskaparmál* is the wife of a giant, in Saxo she is betrothed to a giant, and in *Göngu-Hrólfs saga* she is the foster-mother of a

monstrous son whose actual mother is thought to have been a sea-hag; Hulð also has elemental associations which suggest a giant origin; and Hyndla is explicitly called *brúðr iǥtuns* (*Hyndluljóð* 50,3). Since the narrator of *Vǫluspá* also says that she was brought up by giants, it seems likely that this was a common literary assumption about *vǫlur* in mythological and legendary sources, and that cases where *vǫlur* are said to be of Sámi or other remote northern origins represent a later rationalisation of this tradition. It may be added that some Norwegian legal codes make little distinction between magic-working Sámi and trolls: the *Ældre Borgarthings-Christenret* (I, 16) decrees that such a woman should be allowed to leave the district with all her property, because:

Ækki vældr hon þui siolf at hon er troll.

She does not cause herself to be a troll. (*NGL* [1846–95], I, 351)

IV. Heiðr and the Evil Woman

At the end of st. 22 it is said of Heiðr:

æ var hon angan illrar brúðar

she was always the joy of an evil woman,

and most commentators have merely remarked on the bad reputation of those who practised *seiðr*. Hermann Pálsson (ed. 1996, 50) differs from other editors (including his own 1994 edition, p. 9) in reading *þjóðar* ‘nation’ instead of *brúðar*, again associating it with the Sámi; but as the Codex Regius scribe himself has apparently corrected this reading to *brúðar* (which is also found in H), it is difficult to justify the reading *þjóðar* here. But what exactly might *brúðar* mean in this context? Does it refer to a particular evil woman, or to evil women in general, and what kind of evil is meant?

The word *brúðr* is very common in Old Norse verse, and appears in the three lexical senses ‘bride’, ‘wife’ and ‘woman’ (which flow into each other to some extent). But most instances of it are of a few specific kinds, some of whose connotations may seem surprising. Since the reference in *Vǫluspá* is to an *ill brúðr*, three groups of approving usages may be ignored here (*brúðr* plus the title of a nobleman, e.g. *jarla brúðr*, *Guðrúnarkviða I*, 3,2; cases derived from Christian religious expressions of the ‘bride of Jesus’ type, e.g. *brúðir Jésú*, *Heilagra Meyja drápa* 4,1 (*Skj.* II B, 583; Kock, II, 322, *SPSMA* VII, 894); and

complimentary addresses to attractive and/or noble women as *brúðir* (e.g. *Helgakviða Hundingsbana II*, 35,7).

Most, however, appear in more sinister contexts:

1. The largest group is of 'brides' or potential 'brides' of giants: *bergrísa brúðr*, *Grottasöngur* 24,1–2; *brúð(i)r jötuns*, *Hyndluljóð* 4,6, 50,3; *brúðr Aurnis jóða*, *Draumvísur (XI)* 10,3 (*Skj.* I B, 400; Kock, I, 198); *brúðr bergjarls*, *Anon (X) lausavísa III A* 1,1 (*Skj.* I B, 173, Kock, I, 92); *brúðir bplvísar*, *Hárbarðsljóð* 23,3; *brúðr sefgrímnis mága*, *Pórsdrápa* 4,7–8 (*Skj.* I B, 140; Kock I, 77; Faulkes [1998], I, 26). Other *brúðir* who fall more loosely into this group include the proposed bride of the dwarf Alvíss in *Alvíssmál* 1,2, 2,6, 4,2 and the *brúðir berserkia* 'brides of berserks' whom Þórr boasts of having fought in *Hárbarðsljóð* 37,1–2.
2. Other *brúðir*, though sometimes the sexual partners of gods, are themselves giantesses (Skaði in *Grímnismál* 11,5; Jörð in *Hallfreðr vandræðaskáld's Hákonardrápa* 6,1–2, Eyvindr skaldaspillir's *Háleygjatal* 15,3 and Eyjólfur dádaskáld's *Bandadrápa* 3,5 – see *Skj.* I B, 148, 62, 191 and Kock I, 81, 38, 101 respectively). Others again are hags who appear to have no husbands, like the *gýgr* ('hag') who speaks out of a stone and is addressed as *brúðr* by the dead Brynhildr in *Helreið Brynhildar* 3,2. A particularly interesting example of a troll-woman 'bride' in the context of this argument is the wolf-kenning *heiðingja ... brúðar*, 'of the heath-ranger's bride', in the last stanza of Oddi's *drápa* quoted in *Stjörnu-Odda draumr* ch. 9 (ed. Þorhallr Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson [1991], ÍF 13, 481), referring to the female warrior Hléguðr, who in battle magically acquires a wolf's head and becomes invisible unless looked at under one's left hand.
3. Three doubtful cases may refer to the idea of features of the natural world being seen as giantesses: Snæbjörn's reference to waves as *skerja ... níu brúðir* 'the nine brides of the skerries' (*Lausavísa* 1,2–4; *Skj.* I B, 201; Kock, I, 105); the reference to the sun as *heiða brúðr himins* 'bright bride of heaven' in *Grímnismál* 39,6; and most interestingly, though very uncertainly, Einarr Skúlason's designation of Freyja as *Vanabrúðr* in *Øxarflokkur* 5,2 (*Skj.* I B, 450; Kock, I, 221), though this might be placed in the 'complimentary' group.
4. There are four uses of *brúðr* in contexts connected with death: *Atlakviða* 41,7, where Guðrún is setting fire to Atli's hall, killing everyone inside; *Helgakviða Hundingsbana II* 46,9–10, where Helgi refers to the presence of *brúðir byrgðar í haugi* 'brides/women buried in the mound'; *Sigurðarkviða in skamma* 53,4, where the dying Brynhildr is referring

to herself; and Hrafn Qnundarson, *lausavísa* 1,3 (*Skj.* I B, 188; Kock, I, 100), who dreams that the bed of his *brúðr* is reddened with his own blood. Akin to these are at least two references to valkyries as *brúðir*: *Grípisspá* 16,2, referring to the valkyrie Sigdrífa, and *Helgakviða Hjörvarðssonar* 7,3, referring to Sváva. Two other valkyrie-like figures are also called *brúðir*: the favourable dream-woman who will receive Gísli after his death (Gísli Súrsson, *lausavísa* 22,3; *Skj.* I B, 100; Kock, I, 58); and the figure of Guðrún in armour in *Atlakviða* 43,3.

5. *Brúðr* also appears in a number of contexts which imply the unreliability or treacherous behaviour of women: *Grípisspá* 45,6, 46,2, 49,2, all use *brúðr* to refer to Brynhildr while predicting her resentful and treacherous behaviour; one of the proverbially unreliable things listed in *Hávamál* (86,5) is *brúðar beðmálom* ‘the words of a woman in bed’; *Sigrdrífumál* 28,2–3 warns against being tempted to kiss *fagrar / brúðir becciom á* ‘pretty women on the benches’; and Kórmákr (*lausavísa* 23,2; *Skj.* I B, 75; Kock, I, 45) alludes regretfully to how he used to trust Steingerðr. One might also add *Völundarkviða* 19,2 (which may refer to Völundr’s swan-wife and could also belong to the valkyrie group), and 33,9 (referring to the sexually pliant Bøðvildr).

A few of these examples are doubtful, but between them these groups account for up to 41 of the 54 instances of *brúðr* listed in *LP*. To judge from the surviving uses of the word in verse, therefore, the phrase *illrar brúðar* is most likely to refer to a giantess or the like, to a context associated with death, or to sexually motivated unreliability. It does not otherwise appear in contexts directly connected with *seiðr*, so we should probably assume that whoever this woman may be, she needs Heiðr’s prophetic gifts because she does not share them.

V. Gullveig

I shall now turn back to the meaning of the name Gullveig, which is found only in *Völuspá*. It seems likely that the poet invented the name himself; if so, her meaning can only be what a contemporary audience could gather from the name. This could point towards an allegorical interpretation of her as a personification of the greed for gold, but it is alternatively possible that the poet intended his audience to recognise in her a mythological being who usually goes by another name.

Gull- is a rare first-element in personal names – the only other instances I have found are Guðrún’s sister *Gullrönd* (*Guðrúnarkviða I*), where it may

suggest gold edging on her clothing; the dwarf-name *Gullmævill* in *Pula IV* ii 4,3 (*Skj.* I B, 672; Kock I, 336), which probably refers to the skill of dwarves as goldsmiths; *Gullnir*, a giant-name in *Helgakviða Hundingsbana I*, 43,3, probably implying great wealth; *Gullintanni* ‘gold-tooth’, a by-name of Heimdallr (*Gylfaginning* ch. 27, ed. Faulkes [1982], 25, trans. Faulkes [1987], 25); *Gulla* and *Gulli*, both probably derived from nicknames denoting wealth; and *Gullkúla* ‘gold knob’, possibly from a nickname for someone with a precious possession made of gold (for the last three, see Lind [1905–15], cols. 349, 400–01).

In nicknames the element *gull-* is less unusual (see Lind [1920–25], cols. 123–25). It may be prefixed to the names of rich people (e.g. *gull-Ása*, *gull-Haraldr*), can appear alone meaning ‘the rich’ (*gul(l)i*), or in compound nicknames (e.g. *gullkleppr* ‘gold-mass’, *gullkorni* ‘rich farmer’, *gullskór* ‘gold-shoe’ – the last applied to Hallvarðr, King Hákon Hákonarson’s envoy to Iceland, possibly because his travels brought so much revenue to the king). It can also denote the owners of objects made of or covered with gold (e.g. *gull-beri* ‘gold carrier’, *gullháls* ‘gold-neck’, *gullhjálmr* ‘gold helmet’, *gullkambr* ‘gold comb’, *gullknappr* ‘gold button’). Three names might refer to people with blonde hair (*gullkárr* ‘gold-curl’, *gullskeggr* ‘gold-beard’, *gullbrá* ‘gold-brow’), but this interpretation is doubtful in all three cases. Lind regards the first two as double nicknames (i.e. ‘rich man with curly hair’, ‘rich man with a beard’). *Gullbrá* in *Vilmundar saga víðutan* is explicitly named after an omen that she will marry a king (ed. Loth [1964], 141), and here it must refer to a gold crown. *Gullbrá* in the folktale *Gullbrá og Skeggi* (ed. Jón Árnason [1961], I, 140–44) is a hag who owns a chest of gold, and here it may imply a woman who wears gold ornaments on her forehead. The only metaphorical *gull-* nicknames are translated from Latin or Greek: *gullmunnr* ‘golden mouth’ (applied to St. John Chrysostom), *gullvarta* (the name of a watch-tower in Byzantium, *AEW* 194). Except in classically-derived sources, therefore, *gull-* is used in personal names only to refer to wealth or to gold objects, not to figurative excellence or golden colour.

There are also some non-personal mythological names beginning in *Gull-* or *Gullin-*, mostly applied to animals belonging to the gods: Freyja’s (or Freyr’s) sacred boar *Gullinbu(r)sti* ‘golden-bristle’ (*Hyndluljóð* 7,6, *Gylfaginning* ch. 49, *Skáldskaparmál* ch. 7);²¹ *Gull(in)faxi* ‘gold mane’, the horse given by Þórr to his son Magni after Hrungnir was killed (*Skáldskaparmál* ch. 17; ed. Faulkes [1998], I, 20–22; trans. Faulkes [1987], 77–79); a bull called *Gullinhorni* ‘golden horn’ (*Pula IV* ö 3,2; *Skj.* I B, 669; Kock I, 334; *Skáldskaparmál*, ed. Faulkes [1998], I, 131);²² *Gullinkambi* ‘golden comb’, the cock that wakes the gods in *Völuspá* 43,2; *Gulltoppr* ‘gold-top’, listed among the horses of the Æsir

in *Grímnismál* 30,5 and *Þulur I a* 1,5 and *IV rr* 1,3 (N-K 63; *Skj.* I B, 656, 675; Kock I, 321, 340), which is said by Snorri to be Heimdallr's horse (*Gylfaginning* chs. 27, 49, *Skáldskaparmál* ch. 8);²³ and Heimdallr's nickname *Gullintanni* (see above). In these cases, the main implication seems to be possession by the gods, but there may also be an implication that the animals concerned are in some sense made of gold (see below).

There are also many common nouns in Old Norse verse which have the first element *gull-*. The largest group of these, which is not relevant to *Völuspá*, is of nouns for men who use gold, usually as gatherers or generous distributors of it (*gullbroti*, *gullkennir*, *gullmiðlendr*, *gullsamnandi*, and six others), but occasionally as smiths (*gullsmiðr* and probably *Gullmævill*, see above). Two terms for snakes, which probably refer to their lying on hoards of treasure, are also irrelevant here (*gullbúi*, *gullormr*).

When these are discarded, only two types of compound remain. The first is a large group referring to objects made of or covered with gold: *gullband*, *gullbaugr*, *gullbitill*, *gullbrynja*, *gullhjalmr*, *gullhlað*, *gullhring*, *gullker*, *gullmen*, *gullseimr*, *gullskál*, *gullstafr*. The second is a pair of woman-kennings: *gullfit* 'gold-land', *gullskorð* 'gold-support', to which we should probably add *gull-Skǫgul* (where the valkyrie-name *Skǫgul* seems to stand for 'woman') and the name *Gullrǫnd* (see above). There are no compound nouns which refer to any psychological or moral effect of gold; and Lotte Motz's theory (Motz [1993a], 82–84) that the name simply means 'golden (coloured) drink' also seems unlikely, since there are no other nouns that refer simply to golden colour.

The element *-veig* is not uncommon in female names; in verse we find *Álmveig* (one of the ancestresses of the *Skjöldungar* in *Hyndluljóð* 15,5), *Bǫðveig* (said in *Sólarljóð* 79,4 to be the eldest daughter of *Njǫrðr* – *Skj.* I B, 648; Kock, I, 316), *Rannveig* (in *Óláfr inn helgi*, *lausavísa* 1,3 and *Málsháttakvæði* 18,4, referring to two different women, probably both historical, see *Skj.* I B, 210 and Kock, I, 110; *Skj.* II B, 142 and Kock II, 76) and *Þórveig* (Kormákr, *lausavísa* 22b,4; *Skj.* I B, 75; Kock, I, 45). Also relevant is the woman-kennings *hǫrveig* (*Víga-Glúmr*, *lausavísa* 7,6),²⁴ where the first element means 'flax', 'linen', and clearly refers to what the woman wears; the same might be true in the name *Gullveig*. It is even possible that some poets regarded *-veig* merely as a *heiti* meaning 'lady', possibly with ancestral or Vanic connotations. *Veigr* also appears as a male dwarf-name (*Völuspá* 12,1).

The original meaning of the element is uncertain. Noreen relates it to Gothic *weihs* 'place' and Latin *vicus* 'village', but this seems unhelpful (though it is historically possible),²⁵ for there is no way that a tenth-century poet could have recognised this meaning, or used it in a made-up name. Sijmons and Gering suggest that the root is that found in *víg* 'war' and Gothic *weihan* 'to fight', and

this might have been more meaningful to a tenth-century poet in view of the sword-*heiti veigarr* (*Pula* IV l 4, 1; *Skj.* I B, 663; Kock, I, 328). Most commentators, however, have connected it with the feminine noun *veig* ‘alcoholic drink’, though Dronke (II, 41) suggests that the poet may also have wished to draw on the sense ‘military strength’, which only survives in prose (see CV 690).

All these interpretations seem philologically possible, though the element should clearly be interpreted in the same way in all the names in which it appears, and it is easier to find other female name-elements connected with war than with drink. Common second elements of female names include *-gunnr*, *-hildr*, *-víg*, and among first elements we find *Bǫð-*, *Guð-*, *Hild-*, *Víg-* and the possibly relevant *Val-*. Similar elements connected with drink are much rarer: *Mjað-* among first elements (but not *Ǫl-*, which derives from PON *alu* ‘magic’, ‘ecstasy’; see KJ 239, or possibly ‘protection’),²⁶ but no second elements at all. Of course, *-veig* might be the exception, but the preponderance of military elements in other Norse female names suggests that a connection with military force may be more likely.

The second element of the name *Gullveig* therefore seems most likely to mean either ‘military strength’ or simply ‘lady’; the sense ‘drink’ is possible, but there is no particular reason to favour it, and *veig* never appears in the abstract sense ‘intoxication’, as Müllenhoff’s interpretation (1883, 95–96) would require. The first element could mean ‘made of gold’, ‘wearing gold’, ‘having much gold’, or perhaps ‘belonging to the gods’. If the poem’s first audience were expected to recognise *Gullveig*, therefore, it is most likely that it would have been as a female figure made of, wearing or possessing gold, and endowed with military strength.²⁷ There does not seem to be any warrant in the other uses of the name elements for taking her as an allegorical figure constructed by the poet to symbolise the intoxicating greed for gold.

VI. *Gullveig*, *Porgerðr Hǫlgabrúðr* and *Hyndla*

Turville-Petre (1964, 158–59) regards *Gullveig* as a version of Freyja, and Ursula Dronke (II, 41, 129) has usefully linked the gold-adorned and sensual nature of *Gullveig*/Freyja with the Freyja-like figure of *Porgerðr Hǫlgabrúðr*, who appears in a variety of sources²⁸ and was particularly worshipped by Hákon jarl inn ríki, the last great upholder of heathenism in Norway, who was killed in 995. The sheer variety of sources in which she appears suggests that, although some details are historically improbable, her cult itself is a historical fact. The range of forms of her title (*hǫldabrúðr*, *Hǫlgabrúðr*, *Hǫrðabrúðr*, *hǫrgabrúðr*, *Hǫrgatröll*) points to the same conclusion,²⁹ and implies that she

was worshipped in more than one province of western Norway, and perhaps in southern Iceland as well.

Þorgerðr's first name may be best explained as derived from that of *Gerðr*, the consort of Freyr, with the prefix *Þor-* added to link this Vanir-connected being to the majority cult of the Æsir. This suggestion is strengthened by the likelihood that her name may sometimes have been shortened to *Þóra* or (if Tindr Hallkelsson means to refer to her in *Hákonardrápa* 1,1–4; *Skj.* I B, 136; Kock I, 75)³⁰ to *Gerðr*.

The second element of her title is usually *-brúðr*, though the form *Hqrgatröll* in *Ketils saga Hængs* shows that she had some giant associations (as *-brúðr* itself often has, see above), and the nouns *flagð* 'hag' and *tröll* 'troll' are also applied to her and/or her sister in *Jómsvíkingadrápa* and *Jómsvíkinga saga* respectively (see ed. Blake [1962], 37). The various forms of her title may be translated 'wife of noblemen', 'wife of Hqłgi' or 'woman of the Háleygjjar', 'woman of the Hqrdalanders', 'woman/troll-woman of the shrines'. Snorri and the writer of *Flateyjarbók* ch. 173 take *-brúðr* here to mean 'daughter', but this sense is never found elsewhere, and these sources have probably misunderstood a situation in which the male ruler of a province and his dead ancestors were regarded as the sexual partners of the goddess. In most surviving sources, her living 'husband' is Hákon jarl (in *Flateyjarbók* ch. 326, Óláfr Tryggvason mocks her by saying, after Hákon's death, that she has just lost a husband who was very dear to her);³¹ dead ancestors are also seen as sexual partners of a mythological female figure in *Ynglingatal* 7, 30–32,³² where dead kings are said to provide Hel with sexual enjoyment, and probably in *Grímnismál* 14, which claims that Freyja takes half the slain each day.

Þorgerðr is strongly associated with gold, and her worshippers, including Hákon jarl, had to make offerings of treasure to her in order to keep her favour.³³ In *Flateyjarbók* ch. 326 Óláfr Tryggvason even implies that she was so covetous for gold that she could be 'bought' like a prostitute (like Freyja, as we can see from *Sprla þáttur* ch. 1, *FSN* II, 97–98). The idol of Þorgerðr is described as wearing gold rings (*Njáls saga* ch. 88, *Flateyjarbók* ch. 114), as inlaid with gold (*Flateyjarbók* ch. 114) or as possessing treasure (*Skáldskaparmál* ch. 45, *Flateyjarbók* ch. 326).³⁴ Snorri's statement that the funeral mound of Hqłgi was made of alternate courses of gold and silver and of earth and stone is obviously a hyperbole, but it may point to the custom of using *guldgubber* as temple offerings. This has been well illustrated by Margrethe Watt's excavations at Sorte Muld, Bornholm, where about 2300 *guldgubber* were found (Watt [1999], 132–42). They are tiny gold plates, apparently dating from between the late sixth and the late ninth century, stamped with male and/or female figures (or in a few cases with the forms of animals, usually boars), and they were

probably deposited as religious offerings at sites connected with the worship of the Vanir. They are extremely difficult to find, and the huge number of them found at Sorte Muld probably reflects the unusually meticulous excavation methods used there, notably the water-sieving of large amounts of spoil. The much smaller numbers of them found elsewhere may therefore represent only a small proportion of those that were actually present on the sites concerned. If Gullveig refers to a figure like Freyja or Þorgerðr, it would make perfect sense for her to be referred to as rich in gold, wearing gold, or made of gold. The apparent absence of tenth-century *gubber* may suggest that this kind of cult became less popular in the last century of heathenism; perhaps this may also explain why late-heathen Norwegians were not prepared to tolerate Hákon jarl's 'sacred promiscuity' (see below).

Þorgerðr also engages in military magic on behalf of her followers, shooting arrows from her fingers and sending driving hail against their enemies, though she sometimes demands human sacrifice in return (*Flateyjarbók* chs. 154–55, ed. Sigurður Nordal et al. [1944–45], I, 210–11; *Jómsvíkinga saga* chs. 32–34, ed. Blake (1962), 36–38; *Flateyjarbók* ch. 173, ed. Sigurður Nordal et al. (1944–45), I, 235), or kills her followers when she withdraws her patronage from them (*Harðar saga* ch. 19, ed. Þórhallur Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson [1991], ÍF 13, 51–52). It would thus be appropriate, if Gullveig represented a figure like Þorgerðr, for the name-element *-veig* to refer to military strength, and this would also supply an explanation of the battle-magic (*vígspá*) which the Vanir subsequently use in their war against the Æsir (*Völuspá* 23–24).

According to *Flateyjarbók*, *Jómsvíkinga saga* and *Njáls saga*, Þorgerðr has a sister called *Irpa* 'the Swarthy One', who is present in her temple and also helps her in warfare. The name *Irpa* is probably related to *jarpr* 'swarthy' (cf. Old English *eorp*, used of dark-skinned peoples, e.g. the Egyptians in *Exodus* 194, ed. Lucas [1977], 105 and note); and cf. the ON personal name *Erpr* applied to sons of foreign fathers, e.g. in *Atlakviða* 38 and *Hamðismál* 14, 28 (Dronke I, 11, 164, 167 and note on p. 71); see also Simek (1993), 327. *Irpa* looks like a nickname substituted for the name of a figure whom it was considered unlucky to name directly. She may have been either a 'dark' aspect of Þorgerðr herself, or a figure of Hel, and perhaps the two things sometimes became synonymous.

Irpa is not the only dark sister of a fertility goddess. Freyja opens the narrative framework of *Hyndluljóð* by calling on her 'sister' Hyndla (st. 1,3), who is a giantess and lives in a cave. Freyja's lover Óttarr needs to obtain a detailed knowledge of his ancestry from Hyndla in order to assert his land rights in a legal dispute. The relationship between the two female characters, however, is one of bitter enmity, and after Hyndla has given the necessary information and the *minnispl* 'ale of memory' which will enable Óttarr to remember what

he has been told, Hyndla apparently makes an unsuccessful attempt to attack Freyja with fire (cf. below).³⁵

After telling Óttarr his ancestry Hyndla turns to the parentage of the gods, giants and other beings, the future collapse of the world, and the coming of another figure, which seems to resemble the Second Coming of Christ (stt. 29–44). This passage is so obviously derived from *Völuspá* that Snorri refers to it (or more probably *Hyndluljóð* as a whole) as *Völuspá in skamma* ‘the shorter *Völuspá*’. Recent scholarship has tended to see *Hyndluljóð* as a unified whole,³⁶ but even if this section is interpolated, the interpolator would hardly have added this material if he had not seen a parallel between the framework narrative situation in *Hyndluljóð* and that in *Völuspá*.

Despite Freyja’s traditional association with *seiðr*,³⁷ she is in *Hyndluljóð* apparently unable to prophesy herself; nor is Þorgerðr ever portrayed as having magical powers of her own, apart from the ability to intervene in battle (and even there, she is not victorious against the Jómsvíkingar until she and Irpa unite to employ their storm of hailstones). In the same way, Heiðr and Hamgláma in *Friðþjófs saga* unite in an attempt to destroy Friðþjófr by making the air dark *með sjódrifi ok ofveðri, frosti ok fjúki ok feiknarkulda* ‘with sea spray and a violent storm, frost and snowstorm and deadly cold’ (ed. Larsson [1901], 25).

Freyja needs prophetic information from Hyndla, and similarly, the queen in *Ynglinga saga* chs. 13–14 has to employ the *völva* Hulð rather than carry out the required magic herself. If Gullveig represents Freyja or a similar deity, she may well be the *ill brúðr* who takes pleasure in Heiðr’s magic, and even the choice of the word *brúðr* could be a covert allusion to Þorgerðr Hølgabrúðr or to Freyja as *Vanabráðr* (see Einarr Skúlason, *Øxarflokkur* 5,2; *Skj.* I B, 450; Kock I, 221). The rare word *angan* ‘delight’ may point in the same direction; it appears only three times in verse, and both the other instances are connected with goddesses (*Friggjar angan* referring to Óðinn in *Völuspá* 53,7–8; *Freyju angan leygiar* ‘delight of Freyja’s fire’, a single-line fragment of a love poem by Óláfr Leggsson svartaskáld, *Skj.* II B, 97; Kock II, 52). It is probably a figurative variant of *angi* ‘a delightful perfume’, and might well be connected with incense used in burnt sacrifices to goddesses. The only instance of *angi* in verse is in Hallfreðr vandræðaskáld, *lausavísa* 18,8 (*Skj.* I B, 161, Kock I, 87), where it refers to the delightful scent of a woman, so there could also be a suggestion that Gullveig derives her sexual allure from the magic performed for her by Heiðr.

In *Hyndluljóð*, fire is a weapon (probably used by Hyndla in an unsuccessful attack on Freyja, though most editors have emended the text to make Freyja the attacker), but it is probably also a means whereby she is worshipped by Óttarr (st. 10,1–4), so there would be a particular irony in using it as a way of attacking her. There are three apparently distinct stories of sacrilege against

shrines of Þorgerðr Hølgabruðr (in *Njáls saga* ch. 88, *Harðar saga* ch. 19 and *Flateyjarbók* ch. 326); all three involve the burning of the idol and/or her temple, and in the last case, she is burnt along with an idol of Freyr. Judy Quinn has argued convincingly that Hyndla tries to use fire against Freyja in *Hyndluljóð* 48, and this looks like a fourth instance of the same thing. These stories may all originate from the Christian taste for destruction of idols, but as two of the burnings are carried out by heathens and one by a hag, it may be worth considering whether there could have been another motive for them.

One of the most notable features of Þorgerðr's *protegé* Hákon jarl is his sexual promiscuity. According to *Ágrip* ch. 12:

hann lét sér konur allar jafnt heimilar er hann fýsti til, ok var engi kvenna munr í því gorr, ok engi grein, hvers kona hver væri eða systir eða dóttir. (ed. Bjarni Einarsson [1985], ÍF 29, 16)

he considered all women whom he desired equally available to him, making no distinction as to who was whose wife or sister or daughter. (trans. Driscoll [1995], 22–23).

Fagrskinna ch. 22 adds:

ok gørdisk fégjarn ok rækti ekki lögín, en mest var at því, at hann var ósiðarmaðr um konur, ok þar eptir gørdu menn hans, ok var hvárki þyrmt frændkonum ríkismanna né eiginkonum bæði ríkra ok óríkra. (ed. Bjarni Einarsson [1985], ÍF 29, 139)

and he became greedy and did not respect the laws, but the worst thing was that he was an immoral man about women, and his men imitated him, and neither the kinswomen of powerful men nor the wives of either great or small were spared.

In *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* ch. 45, Snorri says that his reign was characterised by good harvests and peace, and then immediately passes on to his sexual immorality:

jarl lét taka ríkra manna dætr ok flytja heim til sín ok lá hjá viku eða tvær, sendi heim síðan, ok fekk hann af því óþokka mikinn af frændum kvinnanna ... (ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson [1941], ÍF 26, 290–91)³⁸

the Jarl had the daughters of powerful men seized and brought to him, and he would sleep with them for a week or two and then send them home, and because of that he gained great unpopularity among the relatives of the women ...

This may be explained by Richard North's suggestion³⁹ that *Hákon's* promiscuity was linked with his worship of *Þorgerðr Hǫlgabrúðr*, and that he saw himself as the sexual partner and agent of the fertility goddess, empowered to pass on her gift of fertility both to the land and to human beings, especially noble families, through brief cohabitations with a large number of women.

VII. Conclusions

It may be useful at this point to summarise the main conclusions that seem to follow from the foregoing argument:

1. The name *Gullveig* was probably made up by the poet, so that the first audiences of the poem could only interpret her from the meaning of the name, which can hardly be 'intoxication of gold'. Its first element must refer literally to gold, wealth and/or to the gods or their possessions, and its second probably means 'military power' or simply 'woman'. Probable meanings are therefore 'woman made of gold', 'gold-adorned woman' or 'gold-adorned military power'.
2. *Gullveig* is probably a representation (perhaps seen as an idol or *gubbe*) of *Freyja* or some similar goddess, which is attacked with spears (the weapon of the rival cult of *Óðinn*) and subsequently burned because of the seduction or sexually-motivated abduction of other men's wives and female relatives which is a feature of her cult. One can burn an idol, but just as gold emerges refined from the fire, the cult of the goddess herself lives on; she is re-born, not as *Heiðr*, but as herself.
3. *Heiðr* is a common name for a *vǫlva*, and its primary meaning is 'heath'; it is one of a group of single-element *vǫlva*-names connected with wild nature. Many of the features of other *vǫlur* called *Heiðr* link her with the *vǫlva* who is the narrator of the poem rather than with *Gullveig*. Like *Hyndla* and perhaps also *Irpa*, *Heiðr* in *Vǫluspá* is of giant origin, and like *Heiðr* in *Hrólfs saga kraka* she can be induced by magical ritual and by gifts (including gold) to reveal the mysteries she has seen.

A few more conclusions about this section of *Vǫluspá* also seem possible. It seems probable that the failure of their attempt to get rid of *Gullveig* leads the *Æsir* to begin a war against her people, the *Vanir*, which may have had contemporary political echoes of the attack of the *Jómsvíkingar* on *Hákon jarl* (ca. 986). However, they are no more successful against the battle-magic of the *Vanir* than the *Jómsvíkingar* were against *Þorgerðr* and *Irpa*, and this leads them to

conclude a peace-settlement in which they compromise with and absorb the sexual evil represented by the Vanir. So thoroughly do they accept Freyja that they then break their oaths to the Giant Builder and kill him in order to keep her. This interpretation also improves the parallel with the human sins which the gods choose to punish in *Völuspá* 39: they are making a vain attempt to arrest evil in the world by punishing the same three errors into which they have themselves fallen – murder, oath-breaking, and illicit sex with other men's wives.

Heiðr in *Völuspá* may be usefully compared with the unnamed *völva* in *Baldrs draumar*, whose text and framework show significant resemblances to those of *Völuspá*, and where we again meet a *völva* from whom Óðinn extorts wisdom about the mythic future. This time she is explicitly raised from her grave, and in the final confrontation between them Óðinn denies that she is a real *völva* at all; rather, she is *þriggia þursa móðir* 'mother of three monsters' (*Baldrs draumar* 13,7–8 – perhaps she is the troll-woman Angrboða, the mother of Fenrir, the Miðgarðsormr and Hel?).⁴⁰ When Óðinn says she is not a *völva*, he presumably uses the word in its ordinary, non-mythic sense of a travelling female fortune-teller, for the figure he has raised from the dead is not a living and mortal woman, but a giantess or her *draugr* (i.e. one of the walking dead). In view of this parallel, it seems most sensible to interpret Heiðr's statements that she was brought up (or brought forth) by giants (*Völuspá* 2,1–4) and that she 'remembers nine worlds' (*nío man ec heima*, *Völuspá* 2,5) as hints that she, too, may be a giantess raised from the dead, or even a version of Hel herself.

Heiðr may be a sinister 'dark sister' of Gullveig/Freyja, but the tenor of her true prophecy is not finally under her own control. In *Völuspá* 22,3, *völu velspá* has been variously translated. Guðbrandur Vigfússon's suggestion (*CPB* I, 196) that we should read the second word as *vélspá* and translated 'making deceitful prophecies', may be discounted, since all the predictions made by *völur* in these stories can be relied on to come true (see *SG* III:i, 28; oddly, too, Guðbrandur's own subtext translation reads 'the sooth-saying Sybil'). But the compound adjective *velspá* appears nowhere else; so does it mean 'accurate in prophecy', as in Nordal's translation 'wise in prophecy' (ed. 1978, 44), Hermann Pálsson's 'réttspá' (ed. 1994, 61), and *LP*'s 'dygtig spáende' (*LP* 604), or 'making favourable prophecies', as in Dronke's 'a good seer of fair fortunes' (Dronke II, 12)? Lafarge and Tucker (1992, p. 284) suggest both alternatives ('prophesying well or rightly'). The interpretation 'accurate in prophecy' might seem to fit the context of *Völuspá* better, since many of the prophecies made by the *völva* are anything but pleasant for Óðinn; but the encounter between the *völva* Oddbjörg and her hostess Saldís in *Víga-Glúms saga* ch. 12⁴¹ seems rather to point towards the second. Saldís asks Oddbjörg to

prophecy something about her two grandsons, *ok spá vel* – and there is no doubt that her meaning here is ‘and prophecy something favourable’. When the response is not what she was hoping for, she threatens that the *vǫlva* will be driven away *ef þú ferr með illspár* ‘if you go making evil predictions’. If the phrasal verb *spá vel* means ‘to make a favourable prophecy’ and the noun *ill-spá* means ‘an unfavourable prophecy’, we are bound to ask in what sense Heiðr prophesies good fortune: is she speaking from the point of view of her own kind, the giants, to whom any disaster that befalls the gods is good news, and/or is there a deeper hint of the ultimate rebirth of a new and better world, which in the longest possible term is good news for gods and men?

In this paper I have struggled, with much help from past lexicographers, editors and critics from the time of Snorri Sturluson until now, to interpret a mere two stanzas of a brilliant and enigmatic poem. That there is so much to say about them is a tribute to the achievements of those past scholars, but also a measure of how much still remains to be done, since I have left untouched such issues as the attack on Gullveig with spears, the *ganda* of st. 22,4,⁴² the whole process of *seiðr* and the question of how many *vǫlur* there are in *Vǫluspá* (I think one, but for a different view see Dronke II, 27–30, 99–101 and Dronke [1992], 16–21). Studies of the emotional connotations of vocabulary in Old Norse verse, of type-scenes and characters, and of how far individual poets were free to diverge from the traditional patterns are still at an early stage, and there remains a great deal for future scholars to explore and discover.

NOTES

- 1 The first version of this paper was delivered as a presidential address to the Viking Society for Northern Research in June 2000; it was then revised for publication (‘On Heiðr’, *Saga-Book* 25:4 [2001], 394–417), and has been further revised here.
- 2 Eddic poems are normally quoted from N-K, but in *Vǫluspá* 22,5–6 I reject their emendation of the Codex Regius, adopting instead the smaller emendation of *leikin* (= *leikinn*) to *leikin* (Hauksbók reads *hugleikin*); further see Sigurður Nordal, ed. (1978), 44.
- 3 Gordon (1957), 286 (§ 87), 290 (§ 96), 291 (§ 102).
- 4 The earliest recorded use of this word in Old Norse is by the heathen poet Eyvindr skáldaspillir in *Hákonarmál* 21,5 (*Skj.* I B, 60, Kock I, 37), composed ca. 962–65. Since Hákon had been brought up as a Christian in England, *heiðinn* may be a direct borrowing from Old English *hæðen* (which bears a similar relationship to OE *hæð* ‘heath’; CV suggest that *hæðen*/*heiðinn* may actually be derived from the same root

- as Greek *ethnikos*, but that the association with Germanic *haiþi* gave rise to Latin *paganus*). Whether we accept this or not, a connection between heathenism and the wild countryside must have been evident in both Old English and Old Norse.
- 5 Mundal (2002), 191–93 suggests that *Heiðr* is the narrator of the poem, but that she is also the re-born *Gullveig*, whom she interprets as a giant-derived enemy of the gods and patroness of chaos. This seems a fair view of *Heiðr*, but the usual connotations of the elements of the name *Gullveig* do not support the idea that she is identical with *Heiðr*, see below.
 - 6 *LP* also cite a supposed instance of *Heiðr* as a masculine name in a skaldic verse by Helgi Ásbjarnarson, but this is probably an instance of the masculine noun *heiðr* in the sense ‘honour’, ‘praise (in the form of poetry)’ (*Skj.* I B, 183; Kock I, 97).
 - 7 *Hrímnir* appears in *pula IV b*, 1,5 (*Skj.* I B, 658; Kock I, 323); *Hrossþjófr* in *pula IVf*, 3,1 (*Skj.* I B, 660; Kock I, 325); *Haki* twice, but in lists of names of sea-kings, *pula III a*,8 (*Skj.* I B, 657; Kock I, 322) and *pula IV a*, 2,7 (*Skj.* I B, 658; Kock I, 323); *Hveðra* – probably a variant of *Hvæðna* – in the list of names of troll-women, *pula IV c*, 2,7 (*Skj.* I B, 659; Kock I, 324); cf. also *Skáldskaparmál*, ed. Faulkes (1998), I, 109–33.
 - 8 Further, see Sigurður Nordal, ed. (1978), 119–20; SG III.i, 390.
 - 9 Ed. Friis-Jensen and trans. Zeeberg (2005), I, 204–05; trans. Fisher and Davidson (1979–80), I, 76, and see Davidson’s commentary on II, 56, where it is suggested that Rostiophus may be Loki in disguise, the epithet ‘Horse-Thief’ referring to his seduction of the giant builder’s horse, for which see *Gylfaginning* ch. 42, ed. Faulkes (1982), 35; trans. Faulkes (1987), 36; this seems quite possible.
 - 10 Ed. Friis-Jensen and trans. Zeeberg (2005), I, 444–47; trans. Fisher and Davidson (1979–80), I, 203 and notes on II, 110.
 - 11 See Fisher and Davidson (1979–80), II, 110 and Simek (1993), 365.
 - 12 The same story also appears in *Vatnsdæla saga* chs. 10–15, but the *vǫlva* is not named there (ed. Einar Ólafur Sveinsson [1939], ÍF 8, 28–42).
 - 13 Here, *Heiðr* is one of a pair of *seiðkonur*, the other being called *Hamgláma* (‘deceiving shape?’), which probably refers to her shape-changing ability; both are unnamed in the shorter version of the saga (see *FSN* II, 247–70).
 - 14 Further on *vǫlur* in general, see Halvorsen (1976); McKinnell (2003).
 - 15 e.g. Oddbjörg (*Víga-Glúms saga*); Sæunn (*Njáls saga*); Þorbjörg lítilvǫlva (*Eiríks saga rauða*); Þordís (*Fóstbræðra saga*); Þordís á spákonufelli and Þorveig (both *Kormáks saga*); Þuriðr sundafyllir (*Landnámabók*).
 - 16 *Landnámabók* records twelve different women with this name (ed. Jakob Benediktsson [1968], ÍF 1, 461).
 - 17 Snorri’s account is followed by quotation of the *Hrungrnir* myth in Þjóðólfr of Hvín’s *Haustlǫng* 20,1–4 (early tenth century); this mentions the enchantress who begins to remove the whetstone from Þórr’s head (*Haustlǫng* 20,1–4, for which

- see also *Skj.* I B, 18; Kock I, 12), but does not name her or mention the Aurvandill story. However, the fact that Þórr has to fetch Aurvandill across Élivágar ('Frozen Waves') suggests that Gróa was probably thought of as the wife of a giant.
- 18 ed. Friis-Jensen and trans. Zeeberg (2005), I, 90–101; trans. Fisher and Davidson (1979–80), I, 16–19 and notes II, 27.
 - 19 See Simek (1993), 165.
 - 20 *Skáldskaparmál*, ed. Faulkes (1998), I, 114 reads *Hundallr*.
 - 21 See N-K 289; ed. Faulkes (1982), 47, trans. Faulkes (1987), 50; ed. Faulkes (1998), I, 18, trans. Faulkes (1987), 75.
 - 22 This may be a generalised legendary name rather than a possession of the gods, since the farmer Rennir in *Gautreks saga* ch. 6 owns a splendid ox whose horns are inlaid with gold and silver (*FSN* III, 24).
 - 23 Ed. Faulkes (1982), 25, 47, trans. Faulkes (1987), 25, 50; ed. Faulkes (1998), I, 19, trans. Faulkes (1987), 76.
 - 24 *Skj.* I B, 113; Kock, I, 64; ed. Jónas Kristjánsson (1956), ÍF 9, 81; ed. Turville-Petre (1960), 42 and notes on p. 79.
 - 25 cf. the name *Goldeburh*, the heroine of the Middle English romance *Havelok the Dane*, which has strong Scandinavian connections, and the second element of the Norse personal name *Herborg* (*Guðrúnarkviða I* 6,1), in both of which the second element seems to mean 'fortress'.
 - 26 See also McKinnell, Simek and Düwel (2004), 90–96.
 - 27 For an earlier attempt to interpret the name *Gullveig*, see Gehrts (1969), 325–30; he is inclined to prefer the interpretation 'goldkraft' 'power of gold', doubts the identification of Gullveig with Heiðr, and argues that the burning of Gullveig re-enacts a ritual sacrifice (presumably for victory, since the Æsir transfix her with spears). I think this unlikely: ritual sacrifice of a female would be hard to parallel in Old Norse literary sources (and female bog-bodies may result from execution rather than sacrifice); it is not clear to whom the Æsir could make sacrifice; and they are in any case defeated in the ensuing war.
 - 28 For a full list and discussion of these see paper 11, below; cf. also McKinnell (2005), 81–91.
 - 29 On the forms of the name and the relationship between them, see Storm (1885) and *Jómsvíkinga saga*, ed. Blake (1962), 51–52.
 - 30 For both these suggestions, see Chadwick (1950), 411–12, 400.
 - 31 *Flateyjarbók*, ed. Sigurður Nordal et al. (1944–45), I, 453.
 - 32 *Skj.* I B, 8, 12–13; Kock I, 5, 8, and with commentary in *Ynglinga saga*, ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson (1941), ÍF 26, 33–34, 76–79.
 - 33 See *Skáldskaparmál* ch. 45, ed. Faulkes (1998), I, 60, trans. Faulkes (1987), 112; *Flateyjarbók* chs. 114, 154–55, 326 (ed. 1944–45, I, 157, 210–11, 452–54); *Jómsvíkinga saga* (ed. Blake [1962], 36–38).

- 34 See respectively *Njáls saga*, ed. Einar Ól. Sveinsson (1954), ÍF 12, 214; *Flateyjarbók*, ed. Sigurður Nordal et al. (1944–45), I, 157; *Skáldskaparmál*, ed. Faulkes (1998), I, 60, trans. Faulkes (1987), 112; *Flateyjarbók*, ed. Sigurður Nordal et al. (1944–45), I, 453.
- 35 For this interpretation of *Hyndluljóð* 48, see Quinn (2002), 265–67.
- 36 See e.g. Steinsland (1991), 461–94 and Quinn (2002), 262–69.
- 37 See e.g. *Ynglinga saga* ch. 7 (ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson [1941], ÍF 26, 13), where it is claimed that it was she who introduced *seiðr* to the Æsir.
- 38 See also *Flateyjarbók*, ed. Sigurður Nordal et al. (1944–45), I, 237–38.
- 39 See North (1997), 261–64.
- 40 This suggestion is also made by Mundal (2002), 193.
- 41 Ed. Jónas Kristjánsson (1956), ÍF 9, 41; ed. Turville-Petre (1960), 21.
- 42 Further on this, see Dronke II, 132–33 and *Historia Norwegiae*, ed. Storm (1880), 85–86, trans. Kunin (2001), 6–7. On the *völva* more generally, see also Dronke (1992).

3 The Evolution of *Hávamál*

I. The Traditional Sections of *Hávamál*

There are usually excellent methodological reasons for considering Old Norse literary works strictly as they appear in the manuscripts, but in the case of *Hávamál* – the longest eddic text, and one of the most disparate¹ – this approach is not very useful. Admittedly, the scribe of the Codex Regius gives all of it the title *hava mal* ‘The Words of the High One’, and we may be tempted to take this as the name of a single poem, like *Atlamál* or *Hamðismál*. But this heading is clearly derived from the opening of the last stanza, which has usually been regarded as the work of the most recent redactor of an anthology:

Nú ero Háva mál qveðin,
Háva hǫllo í

Now the High One’s words have been spoken
in the High One’s hall (*Hávamál* 164,1–2)

This implies only that Óðinn is imagined by the composer of this stanza to be the speaker throughout, not necessarily that the whole text originated as a single poem.

In 1891, Karl Müllenhoff suggested that *Hávamál* consists largely of a sequence of six poems whose only common feature is that Óðinn is the speaker in all of them. Many other scholars have followed that view since his time.² Müllenhoff’s six poems were:

- I. Stt. 1–79 (approximately): ‘The Gnostic Poem’;
- II. Stt. 95 (or earlier) –102: ‘Óðinn’s adventure with *Billings mæc*’;

- III. Stt. 103 (or 104)–10: ‘Óðinn’s adventure with Gunnlǫð’;
- IV. Stt. 111 (or 112)–37: *Loddfáfnismál*, ‘the poem addressed to (an otherwise unknown man called) Loddfáfnir’;
- V. Stt. 138–45: *Rúnatal*, ‘the list of secrets’;
- VI. Stt. 146–63: *Ljóðatal*, ‘the list of magic songs’.

The Codex Regius has large initials (which it usually uses only at the beginnings of poems) at the beginnings of Stt. 1, 111 and 138,³ and although the seventeenth-century paper manuscripts have no textual authority, their scribes also recognised divisions of the text at these points, where they have the headings *Loddfáfnismál* (st. 111) and *Rúnatalsþáttir Óðins* or *Rúnarþáttir Óðins* (st. 138).⁴ But there are no manuscript indications of major divisions at the beginnings of Müllenhoff’s poems II, III or VI, and his theory does not account for all the stanzas in the text. At least some of those between st. 80 and st. 94 have little to do either with what precedes them (miscellaneous pieces of pragmatic practical advice) or with what follows (Óðinn’s unsuccessful attempt to seduce *Billings mæ*r). This essay will consider some other views of the origins of the poem, and will finally suggest one that seems to me to explain its diversity. The two following essays will then investigate two sections of the collection in more detail.

II. *Hávamál*, *Hugsvinnsmál* and the *Disticha Catonis*

Klaus von See (see especially 1972b, 1999) regards the whole of *Hávamál* as a product of the Christian Middle Ages, and argues that its gnomic sections have been influenced by *Hugsvinnsmál*,⁵ an Old Norse verse adaptation of the Vulgate version of the *Disticha Catonis*, a popular work of moral advice in Latin verse. If this is correct, *Hávamál* is essentially the work of a single poet and must be one of the latest poems in the *Poetic Edda*.

Some details of von See’s argument fail to withstand scrutiny. He maintains that abstract lexical terms such as *hyggiandi* ‘intelligence’ (*Hávamál* 6,1) and *metnaðr* ‘pride’ (*Hávamál* 79,4) in stanzas where there is a correspondence with *Hugsvinnsmál* must be derived from Christian thought and are therefore proof of late date. But as Larrington points out (1993, 99–100), this sense of *hyggjandi* also appears in *Hamðismál* 27,2, which probably dates from the late ninth century,⁶ while the participial adjective *hyggjandi* ‘sensible’ also appears in Þorbjörn hornklofi’s *Haraldskvæði* 11,4, ca. 900 (*Skj.* I B, 23; Kock I, 15). *Metnaðr* does not appear elsewhere in Old Norse verse before the twelfth century, but other similar abstract nouns do, e.g. *hagnaðr* ‘advantage’ (Einarr skálalamm, *Vellekla* 25,6, from ca. 986, *Skj.* I B, 121; Kock I, 68), *snúnaðr* ‘windfall’

(*Vellekla* 14,2, *Skj.* I B, 119; Kock I, 67), *vǫrnuð* ‘warning’ (*Atlakviða* 8,4, possibly around 900).⁷ Larrington also demonstrates that the strand of Christian-inspired terminology in *Hugsvinnsmál* is notably absent from *Hávamál*. But the fact that these vocabulary elements in *Hávamál* fail to support von See’s theory does not amount to positive evidence *against* his view, and a proper assessment of it requires more detailed comparison between the texts.

In comparing texts containing traditional and proverbial wisdom, it is difficult to be sure of influences from one work to another, because similar advice is likely to be given independently in different cultures. Advice such as ‘don’t get too drunk’, ‘know when to keep your mouth shut’ or ‘be a reliable friend’ would be useful in any society (for these, see *Hávamál* stt. 12, 27, 43 respectively), so when two comparable texts are in the same language, we must insist on similarities of image, phrase or grammatical structure as well as of thought before accepting that one has influenced the other.⁸

There are some striking verbal resemblances between *Hugsvinnsmál* and more than one section of *Hávamál*, but if von See’s theory were correct, we should expect these to fall into two groups:

1. Instances where the *Disticha Catonis* (*DC*), *Hugsvinnsmál* (*Hgsv.*) and *Hávamál* (*Háv.*) all share the same meaning.
2. Instances where *Hgsv.* shows a development of thought from *DC* which is shared by *Háv.*

In fact, we find three kinds of correspondence which suggest a quite different relationship between the texts:

1. Commonplace sentiments shared by all three poems but expressed in different ways (A 1–5 below);
2. More distinctive resemblances between *Hgsv.* and *Háv.* which are not shared by *DC* (B 1–6 below); and
3. Instances where *Hgsv.* shares an idea with *DC* but expresses it in phrasing that is used in *Háv.* for a different idea (C 1–4 below).

In the quotations below, correspondences between *Háv.* and *Hgsv.* are indicated in bold type, while agreements between *DC* and *Hgsv.* are underlined.

a. Similar statements in all three poems:

A 1. Gáttir allar

áðr gangi fram

In all directions

before one goes forward

um skoðaz scyli,
um scygnaz scyli;
 þvíat óvíst er at vita
 hvar óvinir
 sitia á fleti fyrir. (*Háv.* 1)

one ought to look round,
 one ought to peer round;
 because you cannot know with certainty
 where enemies
 may sit in the hall in front of you.

Um at litask
þarf maðr alla vega
ok við víti varask.
 Glöggþekkin
 skyli gumna hverr,
 fróðr ok forsjáll vera. (*Hgsv.* 81)

A man needs to look round
 in all directions
 and beware of disaster.
 Clear of judgement
 each man must be,
 wise and fore-seeing.

Quod sequitur spectat quodque
imminet ante, videto;
 illum imitare deum, partem qui spectat
utramque. (*DC* II, 27)

Have an eye to what is going on, and
 look in advance at what is coming;
 imitate that god (Janus) who looks in
 both directions.

Gnomic poems in any tradition can be expected to advocate vigilance, since the whole point of gnomic poetry is to put people on their guard. The *DC* couplet here urges us to look forward and back *in time*, and lacks the sense of potential danger that appears in both Old Norse texts. *Hgsv.* uses *DC*'s idea of foresight, but prefaces it with the idea of looking round in all *spatial* directions for imminent danger. This is also found in *Háv.*, but the idea of looking backward and forward in time does not appear; instead, we have the vivid image of enemies sitting in the hall that a man is about to enter. The Janus image in *DC* may have reminded the poet of *Hgsv.* of a poetic phrase about looking in all directions that already existed in Old Norse poetry; he may have adopted it either from *Háv.* or from some other traditional source. There is no particular resemblance here between *Háv.* and *DC*.

A 2. Þá er horscr oc þøggull
 kømr heimisgarða til,
 sialdan verðr víti vorom;
 þvíat óbrigðra vin
 fær maðr aldregi
 enn mannvit mikit. (*Háv.* 6,4–9)

When a sensible, taciturn man
 comes onto the premises
 there's seldom a penalty for the wary;
 for a more reliable friend
 a man never gets
 than great common sense.

Ómálugr skal
 ok stilla orðum vel

He ought to be taciturn
 and arrange his words well

sá er vill guðs ást geta.
 Æðra kragt
fær maðr aldregi
en vera í tungu trúr. (*Hgsv.* 19)

who wants to get God's love.
 A loftier power
 a man never gets
 than to be true in his tongue.

Virtutem primam esse puta compescere
linguam;
proximus ille deo est, qui scit ratione
 tacere.

Think it the foremost power to be able
 to control your tongue;
 he is nearest to God, who knows by
 reason (when) to be silent.
 (*DC* I, 3)

The value of knowing when to keep quiet is another commonplace of gnomic poetry, but here *Háv.* is quite different in spirit from the other two sources. *Hgsv.* 19,1–3 provides quite a close translation of the Latin, and *Æðra kragt* (19,4) is probably derived from *Virtutem primam* at the beginning of the Latin distich. *Hgsv.* 19,4–6 and *Háv.* 6,7–9 show the same structure:

x (comparative adj. + accusative noun) *fær maðr aldregi en y* (accusative topic phrase).

But this has no counterpart in *DC*, and the sentiments in *Hgsv.* and *Háv.* are quite different. In *Hgsv.* the highest power is integrity of speech, whereas the *Háv.* stanza is concerned purely with the practical advantages of being cautious and sensible. Again, it seems likely that the *Hgsv.* poet remembered the formula from a familiar stanza that began with advice to speak little, but that he wanted to reproduce the religious moral of *DC* rather than the hard-headed practicality of the *Hávamál* poet. The opposite possibility – that the *Hávamál* poet deliberately removed the moral element – seems an unlikely thing for any twelfth- or thirteenth-century poet to do.

A 3. Ef þú átt annan,
þannz þú illa trúir,
 vildu af hánun þó gott geta,
fagrt scaltu við þann mæla,
en flátt hyggja
 oc gjalda lausung við lygi. (*Háv.* 45)

If you have another (friend)
 whom you don't trust well,
 but you want to get some good from
 him,
 you must speak him fair
 but be false in your thought
 and repay falsehood for a lie.

Fláráðs manns orðum,
þótt hann fagrt mæli

In a deceitful man's words
 though he may speak fair

þarptu eigi þeim at trúa.
 Glyslig orð
 láttu í gegn koma;
gjaltu svá líku líkt. (*Hgsv.* 42)

you do not need to trust.
 With specious words
 you should reply,
 – thus pay him like for like.

Qui simulat verbis nec cordis est fidus
 amicus,
 tu cui fac simile: sic ars deluditur arte.
 (*DC* I, 26)

To a man who pretends in words but is
 not a true friend in his heart,
 you behave to him likewise: thus guile
 is deceived by guile.

All three poems share the general theme of repaying false friendship in kind, but in *Háv.* this forms a natural antithesis to the preceding stanza, on how to cultivate a real friendship (see C 2 below), and this is not shared by either *Hgsv.* or *DC*. *Háv.* and *Hgsv.* share the ‘fair/false’ antithesis and the image of ‘repayment’, neither of which is in *DC*. Again, it seems probable that the *Hgsv.* poet used a familiar Norse expression, derived from *Hávamál* or from popular proverbial wisdom, and that *DC* has not influenced *Hávamál* at this point.

A 4. Meðalsnotr
 scyli manna hvern,
 æva til snotr sé;
ørlog sín
viti engi fyrir,
 þeim er sorgalausastr sefi. (*Háv.* 56)

Moderately wise
 each man should be,
 never let him be too wise;
 his own fate
 let none know beforehand –
 his mind will be most free from
 sorrow.

Ørlög sín
viti engi fyrir,
né um þat qnn ali.
 Flestir þat vita,
 at mun flærðvorum
 dauði ok líf duga. (*Hgsv.* 126)

His own fate
 let none know beforehand,
 or nurse anxiety about that.
 Most people know
 that for those wary of sin
 both death and life will bring benefit.

Multum venturi ne cures tempora fati:
 non metuit mortem, qui scit contem-
 nere vitam. (*DC* IV, 22)

Do not pay much attention to the time
 of your coming fate;
 he does not fear death, who knows
 how to despise life.

The idea that one should make the most of life without worrying about fate or death is another commonplace: ‘Eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die’,

as the English proverb puts it, adapting Ecclesiastes 8.15. But the rationale for this outlook varies. *DC* advises against worrying about when one will die because this life should be despised. *Háv.* 56, by contrast, suggests that life is happiest when one does not know one's own fated future (that is, all unfortunate aspects of it, not merely when one will die). *Hgsv.* 126,1–2 is identical with *Háv.* 56,4–5 in phrasing, but after conveying the first half of the *DC* sense, the *Hgsv.* poet gives a different rationalisation: the virtuous man need not worry, because both life and death will bring him good things. Again, it seems more likely that the *Hgsv.* poet adapted and moralised a poetic phrase from *Hávamál* or some similar source than that the *Hávamál* poet suppressed a Christian moral in favour of an outlook which any Christian hearer would have regarded as irresponsible.

A 5. At három þul
hlæðu aldregi!

Opt er gott

þat er gamlir kveða.

Opt ór scōrpom belg

scilin orð koma. (*Háv.* 134,5–10)

At a hoary sage
never laugh!

Often it's good,
what old people say.

Often from a shrivelled bag of skin
perceptive words come.

Eigi skaltu hlæja,
ef þú vill horskr vera
at öldruðum afa.

Opt þat ellibjúgr man,
sem ungr veit ekki til:

kennir gott gumum. (*Hgsv.* 122)

You must not laugh
if you want to be wise
at an aged grandfather.

Often someone bent with age remembers
what a young person does not know
about:
he teaches men what is good.

Cum sapias animo, noli ridere senec-
tam:
nam quicunque senet, puerilis sensus
in illo est. (*DC* IV, 18)

If you would be wise in mind, do not
laugh at old age:
for whoever grows old has the sense
of a child in him.

Advice not to laugh at old people is commonplace in gnomic writings – see e.g. Ecclesiasticus 8.6: 'Despise no man for being old'. The *DC* couplet personifies Old Age rather than focussing on an individual old man, as the two Norse texts do, and its rationale is that the old should be excused because they cannot help being childish. This is the direct opposite of the reasoning in *Háv.* and *Hgsv.*, which both follow the instruction not to laugh at an old man with a construction

beginning with *opt* that expresses the view that the old often have wisdom to teach. The poet of *Hgsv.* might have reversed the sense of his Latin original through sheer independence of mind, but it seems more likely that he was influenced by existing wisdom poetry in Old Norse, perhaps by *Hávamál* itself.

None of these correspondences looks convincing as evidence for indirect influence on *Hávamál* from *DC*.

b. Resemblances between Hávamál and Hugsvinnsmál that are not shared by the Disticha Catonis:

B 1. At hyggiandi sinni

scylit maðr hræsinn vera

heldr gætinn at geði. (*Háv.* 6,1–3)

About his own intelligence

a man should not be boastful

but rather guarded in mind.

Af hyggiandi sinni

skyldi maðr óhræsinn vera

nema górisk þarfir þess.

(*Hgsv.* 72,1–3)

About his own intelligence

a man should be without boasting

unless the need for this arises.

Insipiens esto, cum tempus postulat,

aut res;

stultitiam simulare loco, prudentia

summa est. (*DC* II, 18)

Be foolish when the time or circumstances demand it;

to feign foolishness in the (right) place is the height of wisdom.

The noun *hyggjandi* ‘intelligence’ cannot be regarded as a late and Christian lexical item (see above). The texts of *Hgsv.* and *Háv.* are obviously related here, but their warning against boasting about one’s own wisdom is quite different from the advice in *DC* to show wisdom by feigning foolishness. *Hgsv.* keeps *DC*’s idea of an appropriate occasion, but it is for showing off one’s wisdom rather than for pretending to be a fool. In this case, it is difficult to see why the poet of *Hgsv.* should have deviated from his source so decisively if he was not influenced by existing Old Norse poetry.

B 2. Ósviðr maðr

vakir um allar nætr

oc **hyggr at hvívetna;**

þá er móðr,

er at morni kómr,

alt er víl, sem var. (*Háv.* 23)

The foolish man

stays awake for nights on end

and worries about everything;

then he is tired

when morning comes,

– all that was wrong still is.

Hugsjúkr maðr
kvíðir hvetvetna,
aldri honum dagr um dugir.
 (Hgsv. 138,4–6)

The anxious man
 worries about everything,
 – day never does him any good.

Suspectus caveris, ne sis miser omni-
 bus horis
 nam timidus et suspectus aptissima
 mors est (DC IV, 43)

Beware of suspicion, lest you be mis-
 erable all the time,
 for death is most suitable for those
 who are timid and suspicious.

Here *Háv.* and *Hgsv.* share some phrasing, as well as the idea that the anxious man is foolish to stay awake worrying because he will be too tired to make good use of the next day (although in *Hgsv.* this appears in a truncated and allusive form which suggests that the sentiment may already have been familiar in Old Norse). The *DC* sentiment, on the other hand, is aimed at those who are made miserable by suspicion, and suggests, rather aggressively, that they deserve to die. The idea of staying awake at night does not appear in *DC*.

B 3. Vin sínum
 skal maðr vinr vera
 oc **gjalda giðf við giðf.**
 (*Háv.* 42,1–3)

Towards his friend
 a man should be a friend
 and repay gift with gift.

Hatri þú hafna;
 hlæ þú at ǫngum;
gjalt giðf við giðf. (Hgsv. 9,1–3)

Do not promote hatred;
 laugh at no one;
 pay gift in exchange for gift.

Irasci ob re noli,
neminem irriseris ...
 mutuum da.
 (DC, *Breves sententiae* 30, 31, 16)

Do not get angry about any matter,
 Laugh at no one ...
 Give a loan.

Here *Hgsv.* derives its first two *sententiae* from adjacent statements in the *breves sententiae* (brief opinions) that begin *DC*; it follows the first loosely and the second exactly. Its third *sententia*, however, agrees exactly with *Háv.* and is quite different from the non-adjacent *brevis sententia* 16 in *DC*, which is suggested as its source by Hermann Pálsson. The translator of *Hgsv.* may have misunderstood this *sententia*, associating *mutuum* ‘a loan’ with *mutualis* ‘mutual’ and thus assuming the idea of two-way giving. But this mistake

would be all the more likely if the proverbial advice found in *Háv.* was already traditional in Old Norse verse, since it would lead the *Hgsv.* poet to assume that this piece of proverbial advice was similar to one that he already knew. More probably, the *Hgsv.* poet may be repeating a Norse aphorism that had no source in *DC*.

B 4. Fullar grindr
sá ek fyr Fitiungs sonom,
 nú bera þeir vánar vql;
 svá er auðr
 sem augabragð,
 hann er valtastr vina. (*Háv.* 78)

I have seen full sheep-pens
 belonging to Fitiung's sons –
 now they carry a beggar's staff;
 (possession of) wealth is
 like the twinkling of an eye
 it is the most fickle of friends.

Hársíðan mann
sá ek í hǫlða liði;
 þó var honum skalli skapaðr.
 Svá er maðr
 sem margt á fjár
 ok verðr um síðir snauðr. (*Hgsv.* 80)

I have seen a long-haired man
 in a band of warriors,
 yet a bald head was fated for him.
 That's what a man is like
 who has lots of money
 and becomes needy at last.

Rem tibi quam scieris aptam dimittere
 noli;
 fronte capillata, post haec occasio
calva. (*DC* II, 26)

Do not let something slip that you
 know is suitable for you;
 opportunity has hair in front, but is
 bald behind.

DC II, 26 is about opportunity rather than wealth: one must seize an opportunity before it is too late. *Hgsv.* picks up the image of baldness but changes the basic idea. Here the comment is on wealth and its mutability, and this is also the subject of *Háv.* 78. The two Norse poems also share a formula which uses *sá ek* in the first half-stanza and *svá er* followed by a sentiment about wealth in the second. The Norse sources are also more fatalistic: wealth is seen as mutable, and there is no sense that one can alter this by seizing one's opportunities. The easiest explanation of this change is that the poet of *Hgsv.* knew that the *DC* couplet was sometimes explained in terms of material wealth,⁹ but was also familiar with an Old Norse sentiment like the one in *Hávamál* about the transitory nature of wealth.

B 5. góðan mann
teygðo þér at gamanrúnom
 oc nem línargaldr, meðan þú lifir.
 (*Háv.* 120,5–7)

attract a good person
 into a pleasant relationship with you
 and while you live, learn the magic of
 being well liked.

Kostum þú safna.**Kynn þik við góða menn.**Vinn þú eigi lǫst né lygi.

(Hgsv. 13,4–6)

Collect virtues.

Acquaint yourself with good people.

Do not practise sin or lying.

Virtute utere.Nihil mentire.(DC, *Breves sententiae* 35, 44)

Practise virtue.

Lie about nothing.

Lines 4 and 6 in this stanza of *Hgsv.* are derived from separated *sententiae* in the opening section of *DC*, but there is no clear parallel there to line 5, which somewhat resembles ll. 5–6 in the *Hávamál* stanza. Ruggerini (1990, 284) suggests that l. 5 in *Hgsv.* may have been intended to parallel *brevis sententia* 42: *Existimationem retine* (‘keep your reputation’), but it is more like the sentiment in *Hávamál*, and a number of other *breves sententiae* are also omitted from *Hgsv.* (nos. 5, 33, 36–38 and probably 16), so there is no need to insist on a source in *DC*. The rest of this stanza of *Háv.* is without parallel in either *Hgsv.* or *DC*. Perhaps the *Hgsv.* poet, in describing the characteristics of moral integrity, has here echoed one of the pieces of advice in *Hávamál* of which it was possible for a Christian to approve.

B 6. **Illo feginn****vertu aldregi,****en lát þér at góðo getið.**

(Háv. 128,5–7)

Pleased by evil

never be,

but rather rejoice in good.

Almanna lofef þú eignask villok heita góðr með gumum,**annars ógæfu****fagna þú aldregi.****Ger þú at góðu gaman.** (Hgsv. 121)

Everyone’s praise

if you want to gain

and be called good among men,

at another’s misfortune

never rejoice.

Be pleased by what is good.

Si famam servare cupis, dum vivis,honestam,

fac fugias animo, quae sunt mala

gaudia vitae. (DC IV, 17)

If you want to keep a good reputation

as long as you live,

make sure to drive out of your mind

the joys of life that are evil.

DC gives a worldly reason for rejecting vicious worldly desires (concern for one’s reputation), and this is reflected in *Hgsv.* 121,1–3, but has no counterpart in *Háv.* *Hgsv.* 121,4–6 shares some phrasing with *Háv.* 128, and both contain a

warning against *schadenfreude*: one should rejoice over good rather than at the misfortune of others (or at evil more generally in *Háv.*). The commentaries on *DC* show that the Latin text was also sometimes understood in this way, but its basic sense is that one should avoid pleasures that corrupt.

c. *Contexts where Hugsvinnsmál derives its thought from the Disticha Catonis but uses the phrasing of a different thought in Hávamál:*

C 1. **Fiár síns,**

er fengit hefr

scylið maðr þorð þola.

Opt sparir leiðom,

þatz hefr líufom hugat,

mart gengr verr, enn varir. (*Háv.* 40)

Concerning one's own property

which one has gained

one should not put up with being
needy.

Often one saves for an enemy

what was intended for a dear one,

much goes worse than expected.

Fengis fjár

neyttu framliga.

Vertu þíns mildr matar.

Aura njóta

láttu auma fira,

ef gerir þarfir þess. (*Hgsv.* 61)

Of the property you have gained

make use boldly.

Be generous with your food.

Allow your gold

to be used for the wretched

if the need for this should arise.

Fac sumptum propere, cum res

desiderat ipsa:

dandum etenim est aliquid, cum

tempus postulat aut res. (*DC* II, 5)

Make suitable payment when the case
makes it desirable to do so:

for something ought to be given, when

the time or situation demand it.

The verbal resemblance between *Háv.* and *Hgsv.* is here limited to the first couplet of each stanza, including the idea that the resources spent are those which one has previously gained (which is not in *DC*). Otherwise, the three texts express different ideas, though all are about the desirability of spending money. *Hávamál* advises that one should not hoard one's resources to the extent of going without what one needs, because one cannot know who will inherit one's wealth. *DC* suggests that there are times and situations in which it is proper to pay out money, but does not say what they are. The *Hgsv.* poet begins with an alliterating phrase about the money one has gained that is reminiscent of *Hávamál*, but then develops the thought of *DC* with the assumption that the proper occasion for giving is when alms for the poor are needed. This is what one might expect of a moral Christian poet who had both *DC* and

Hávamál in mind, but wanted to Christianise the morality of his Latin source and rebuke the selfish attitude evident in *Hávamál*.

C 2. Veiztu, **ef þú vin átt,**
þann er þú vel trúir
 ok vill þú af **honum gott geta:**
 geði scaltu við hann blanda
 oc giǫfo scipta,
 fara at finna opt. (*Háv.* 44)

You know, if you have a friend
 whom you trust well
 and you want to get good from him:
 you must share thoughts with him
 and exchange gifts,
 go to visit him often.

Ef þú vin átt
þann þér vildir sé,
 fýs þú **hann gott at gera.**
Orða þinna
þó hann kunni ǫngva þekk.
 þá skaltu hann við vammí vara.
 (*Hgsv.* 25)

If you have a friend
 who is dear to you
 encourage him to do good.
 Even if for your words
 he is not grateful,
 you must still warn him against sin.

Cum moneas aliquem nec se velit ille
moneri,
si tibi sit carus, noli desistere coeptis.
 (*DC* I, 9)

When you warn someone and he does
 not want to be warned,
 if he is dear to you do not give up
 what you have begun.

Here, the theme of the *Hgsv.* stanza is the same as that of the *DC* couplet: one should continue to admonish a dear friend for his own good even when he does not want to listen. *Háv.* 44 is more cynical: this is how you should cultivate your friend for what you can get out of him. *Háv.* 44,1–2 and *Hgsv.* 25,1–2 share the formula *ef þú vin átt, þann ...* (if you have a friend, who ...), and their third lines also sound similar, but *Hávamál*'s self-centred *af honum gott geta* (to get something good out of him) may have been deliberately adapted to the more Christian message in *Hgsv.*, where the focus is rather on the moral good the friend is encouraged to do.

C 3. Ósnotr maðr,
 ef eignaz getr
 fé eða flióðs **munuð,**
 metnaðr hánom þróaz,
 enn mannvit **aldregi,**
 fram gengr hann driúgt í dul.

The foolish man,
 if he manages to get
 money or a lady's (physical) love,
 pride grows within him.
 but never common sense –
 he goes straight on in folly.

(*Háv.* 79)

Féginri rangri
skaltu firra þik.

Ljót er líkams munúð.

Orðstír betra

getr maðr **aldregi**

en við syndum sjá. (*Hgsv.* 73)

From wrongful avarice
you must distance yourself.

Bodily lust is ugly.

A better reputation

a man never gets

than by beware of sins.

Luxuriam fugito, simul et vitare
memento

crimen avaritiæ; nam sunt contraria

famæ. (*DC* II, 19)

Flee from lust, and at the same time
remember

to avoid the crime of avarice; for they

are (both) damaging to reputation.

Here, the verbal resemblance between *Háv.* and *Hgsv.* is rather remote, no more than the use in both of the words *munuð* and *aldregi* at the ends of ll. 3, 5. The idea in *Hgsv.* and *DC* is that lust and avarice are harmful to one's moral reputation. In *Hávamál* the viewpoint is quite different: here, money and a woman's love are not seen as temptations to evil, but as good things that the fool never has the common sense to make the best use of. Again, it looks as if the translator of *Hgsv.* combined the sense of his Latin original with a phrasal echo from a more amoral wisdom verse that already existed in Old Norse.

C 4. **at háði né hlátri**

hafðu aldregi

gest né ganganda! (*Háv.* 132,5–7)

With scorn or laughter
never treat,

a guest or traveller!

Ógöfga menn

ok ölmusur

skaltu eigi at hlátri hafa.

(*Hgsv.* 14,1–3)

Unlucky people

and paupers

you must not hold up to laughter.

Minorem ne contempseris.

Miserum noli inridere.

(*DC, Breves sententiae* 47, 52)

Do not spurn a lesser person.

Do not mock a wretched man.

Hgsv. roughly follows the two non-adjacent *sententiae* in *DC*, while the category of people at whom *Hávamál* tells us not to laugh (guests and travellers) is quite different. The phrasing shared by *Háv.* and *Hgsv.* is limited to the expression *at hlátri hafa* 'to treat with laughter', which seems too common an idiom to be worthy of notice.

d. Has the Disticha Catonis influenced Hávamál directly?

None of the similarities of wording or image between *Háv.* and *Hgsv.* can be shown to derive from *DC*, but Von See (1972b, 10–12) also argues that *Hávamál* has been influenced by *DC* directly at two points where there are no close parallels between *Háv.* and *Hgsv.* One of these, between *DC* II, 5 and *Háv.* 40, is unconvincing (see C 1 above). The other is as follows:

Mikit eitt
scala manni gefa,
 opt kaupir sér í litlo lof;
með hálfom hleif
oc með hóllo ker
 fecc ec mér félaga. (*Háv.* 52)

Not only big things
should one give someone,
 praise is often bought with little;
with half a loaf
and with a tilted bowl
I gained myself a partner.

Ne dubita, cum magna petes, impend-
ere parva:
his etenim rebus coniungit gratia
caros. (*DC* I, 35)

When you seek great things, don't
hesitate to incur small expenses;
for with these things friendship joins
those who are dear.

There is certainly a resemblance between these two passages, though perhaps rather a commonplace one. But there is also a difference (apart from the image of sharing food and drink which is the most distinctive feature of the *Hávamál* stanza). In *DC*, the thought is that one should *only* make gifts that are worth less than what one seeks to gain, whereas *Hávamál* (for once) seems less self-centred – the aim is to gain a friend, and small gifts *as well as* great ones are recommended. This correspondence seems too slight to demonstrate that *Háv.* is directly dependent on *DC*,¹⁰ and the simplest explanation of the deviations of *Hgsv.* from *DC* at most of the points where it resembles *Háv.* is that *Hgsv.* has used *Hávamál* as a minor source.

e. Transmission and relative dates

If Von See's theory were correct, we would also have to posit an improbably short period of transmission between the writing of the *DC* source manuscript and the composition of *Hávamál*. Ruggerini has shown that the manuscript of *DC* used by the poet of *Hgsv.* 'can be assigned to the period of transition from *Vulgata recentior* to *Vulgata recentissima*, i.e. between the second half of the twelfth and the beginning of the thirteenth century' (Ruggerini [1990], 286; cf. Boas and Botschuyver, eds. [1952], Praefatio XLIX, LX–LXII). Von

See's theory would therefore require us to assume that this manuscript reached Iceland almost immediately after the earliest date at which it could have been copied, that *Hgsv.* was composed soon after that, and that the composition of *Hávamál* followed almost immediately. Even then, when *Gylfaginning* ch. 1 (composed around 1225) quotes from *Hávamál* 1 with the implication that it is a piece of traditional verse,¹¹ we would have to regard this belief as mistaken, since *Hávamál* 1 could not then have been more than about half a century old at the most.

In fact, it seems more likely that *Hgsv.* is considerably later.¹² The earliest evidence we have for knowledge of *DC* in Iceland is an entry in the *máldagar* (inventories of movable property of churches and monasteries) for 1397, in which it is recorded that Viðey monastery possessed a copy of *Cato med Glosa*.¹³ It seems likely that this was a copy of the Latin text with an explanatory gloss in either Latin or Old Norse, though it may have been a Latin *DC* followed by a copy of *Hgsv.* The earliest surviving manuscripts of *Hgsv.* date from the fifteenth century,¹⁴ and the work itself need not be much older than that. In that case, it would seem that its poet has skilfully mingled translation of his main source with echoes from the native tradition of proverbial wisdom poetry, derived from two different parts of *Hávamál*, which he may have known in its present form, possibly even from the Codex Regius itself.¹⁵ This possibility seems to be strengthened by the fact that, like the present text of *Hávamál* but unlike *DC*, *Hgsv.* names itself in its last stanza and compliments its audience:

Hugsvinn's mál

læt ek fyrir hǫlðum **kveðin**
ok kennda ek rekkum ráð.
Hyggins manns
lýsta ek hǫlðum speki.
Hér er nú ljóðum lokit. (*Hgsv.* 149)

A wise man's words
I have caused to be recited before
heroes
and I taught warriors good advice.
A thoughtful man's wisdom
I have made known to noble men.
At this point the song is now finished.

Nú ero Háva mál qveðin

Háva hǫllo í,
allþorfi ýta sonom,
óþorfi iqtina sonom;
heill, sá er qvað,
heill, sá er kann!
níóti, sá er nam,
heilir, þeirs hlýddo! (*Háv.* 164)

Now the High One's words have been
recited in the High One's hall,
very necessary to sons of men,
useless to sons of giants;
good luck to him who recited,
good luck to him who understands!
let him who has learned it, use it,
good luck to those who listened!

Alternatively, both Norse poems may draw independently on a common stock of proverbial sayings in verse that were not always preserved together or in the same form.

It thus seems unlikely that *Hávamál* has been influenced by *Hgsv.*, but probable that *Hgsv.* has borrowed from *Hávamál* or something like it.¹⁶ There is little to support von See's argument that *Hávamál* is a single, late poem, though of course the rejection of his theory does not in itself provide any evidence that any part of the text is early.

III. *Loddfáfnismál* and *Ljóðatal*

Another view of the second half of *Hávamál* has been put forward by Elizabeth Jackson, who argues that the whole of *Hávamál* 111–164 is a single poem, whose structure she characterises as follows:

Frame identifying the main speaker as Óðinn (st. 111)

a) Section 1: gnomic advice (*Loddfáfnismál*, stt. 112–36)

Transition stanza (st. 137)

b) Section 2: on runes and sacrifice (*Rúnatal*, stt. 138–44)

Transition stanza (st. 145)

c) Section 3: magic spells (*Ljóðatal*, stt. 146–61, 162, 1–3, 163)

Frame, again identifying the poem as Óðinn's words, spoken in his own hall and preceded by a reminder of the presence of Loddfáfnir (st. 162, 4–9 and 164).¹⁷

This analysis explains the metrical irregularity of the 'frame' and 'transition' stanzas (though not of stt. 142–44) and the combination of gnomic and mythological blocks of subject matter by suggesting that these were features of this genre of poetry, adducing *Sigrdrífumál* as another example of it. Jackson does not discuss the difficulty of reconciling the two apparent speakers and locations in st. 111 (see below), or the disruption of the metre and sequence of meaning in the allusion to Loddfáfnir in st. 162, but she does argue persuasively that stt. 111 and 164 function as an introduction and conclusion to the whole of the second half of *Hávamál* in its present form (Jackson [1994], 36–38).

The two stanzas that Jackson regards as 'transitional' are also metrically odd, and neither has much to do with what follows it. The 'Loddfáfnir' opening of st. 137 (in the variant of *ljóðaháttir* known as *galdralag*) repeats the refrain of the preceding gnomic section, which is here followed by a sequence of medical remedies expressed in a loose form of *málaháttir*. This is unrelated either to the moral advice that precedes it or to the account of Óðinn's sacrifice that

follows. Jackson suggests that the allusion to runes in st. 137,14 may form a link with the magically effective runes of stt. 142–44 (Jackson [1994], 39), but since that passage is also in conflict with its surroundings, this probably tells us only about the work of some reviser subsequent to the original poet.

St. 145 is also probably composite: its first half, which consists of five lines of an unfinished *ljóðaháttir* stanza, expresses the idea that it is better for human beings not to worship at all than to sacrifice too much, and seems, as Jackson suggests, to elaborate the theme of st. 144, albeit in a different metre; it has nothing to do with Óðinn's eighteen magic songs, which follow. The second half of st. 145 is a quatrain in *fornyrðislag* announcing what Þundr (Óðinn) *reist* 'carved' when he rose up again (presumably after his journey to the world of the dead). Although this alludes to the sacrifice myth narrated in stt. 138–41, it too is in conflict with what follows, since it sees Óðinn's newly-acquired wisdom as expressed in written runic inscriptions rather than in chanted spells.

Jackson's second main argument is that the structure of *Hávamál* 111–64 resembles that of *Sigrdrífumál*, which she analyses as follows:

Opening Frame: the narrative of the encounter between Sigurðr and the valkyrie Sigrdrífa (stt. 1–5)

a) Section 1: types of runic magic (stt. 6–13, cf. '*Ljóðatal*')

b) Section 2: the origins of runes (stt. 14–19, cf. '*Rúnatal*')

Transition: Sigurðr commits himself to Sigrdrífa (stt. 20–21)

c) Section 3: gnomic advice (stt. 22–37, cf. '*Loddfáfnismál*').

A lacuna in the Codex Regius begins after st. 37, so a Closing Frame may have been lost at the end. To judge from the prose summary of the same material in *Völsunga saga*, made before this quire of the Codex Regius was lost, this consisted of an interchange of betrothal vows between Sigurðr and Sigrdrífa.¹⁸ Besides the similar structures that she observes in *Sigrdrífumál* and the second half of *Hávamál*, Jackson sees the two texts as having a common balance of subject matter between gnomic advice and the origins of runes and magic spells, although these elements do not appear in the same order.

There are also several similarities of content at a more detailed level. Some of the advice given in *Loddfáfnismál* is echoed in *Sigrdrífumál*: 'don't seek lodging with an enchantress' (*Hávamál* 113–14, *Sigrdrífumál* 26–27); 'don't seduce women' (*Hávamál* 115, *Sigrdrífumál* 28, 32); 'don't quarrel with a fool' (*Hávamál* 122–23, *Sigrdrífumál* 24); 'be wary in drinking' (*Hávamál* 131,7, *Sigrdrífumál* 29–30). Some of the effects claimed for the magic songs in *Ljóðatal* are roughly paralleled in the rune-types of *Sigrdrífumál*. Thus Óðinn's second spell, for doctors (*Hávamál* 147), has the same effect as the *limrúnar* of

Sigrdrífumál 11. His eighth, for reconciling enemies (*Hávamál* 153), is one of the effects claimed for *málrúnar* (*Sigrdrífumál* 12). His fifteenth, which includes wisdom for himself (*Hávamál* 160), resembles the effect of *hugrúnar* (*Sigrdrífumál* 13).¹⁹ Jackson also points out a number of echoes of vocabulary between the two poems (for example, the phrasing of *Hávamál* 120 is echoed in *Sigrdrífumál* 4 and 5). She concludes that this kind of three-part poem may have been a generic type of which the second half of *Hávamál* and the whole of *Sigrdrífumál* are two surviving examples.

It seems to me more probable that the surviving version of *Sigrdrífumál* was composed with knowledge of *Hávamál*, probably in something like its present form. *Sigrdrífumál* shows some signs of rather late composition. In listing types of runes, it replaces the traditional sacred number nine²⁰ with seven kinds of runes – and seven seems to have become a sacred number only with the arrival of Christianity, where it is extremely common.²¹ Its attitude to the charms is also more mechanistic. Óðinn's eighteen charms in *Hávamál* are oral, and become increasingly mysterious as their sequence progresses, whereas *Sigrdrífumál* is concerned with written runes rather than spoken or chanted magic, and even with the exact materials on which those runes are to be carved. *Sigrdrífumál* may also have modified some aspects of its received story-pattern to fit Christian sensibilities. Mundal (1972) and Myhren (1972) demonstrate that the dialogue about the waking of Sigrdrífa in *Sigrdrífumál* 1 contains two phrases (*fólvar nauðir* and *Hrafn's hrælundir*) that suggest that Sigurðr originally woke her, not from sleep, but from the dead. This would link her to a story-pattern whose usual form makes a living child raise his or her dead opposite-sex parent from the dead in order to gain something from them, usually a sacred number of protective charms.²² The replacement of the mother figure with a sexual partner is common in *fornaldarsögur* episodes – see McKinnell (2005), 186–95 – and again suggests recent date; and the waking of Sigrdrífa from sleep rather than from the dead may result from Christian unease about sexual relationships between the living and the dead (see McKinnell [2005], 228–31).

However, the most concrete reason for thinking that the poet of *Sigrdrífumál* knew *Hávamál* is the occurrence in both poems of the word *gamanrúnar*, which appears in Old Norse verse only in *Hávamál* 120,6 and 130,6 and *Sigrdrífumál* 5,8. In *Hávamál* its meaning is figurative, describing the beginning of a loving relationship with a good woman (*Hávamál* 130) or the maintenance of a cordial relationship with a friend (*Hávamál* 120). But *Sigrdrífumál* takes it literally, to refer to a runic spell which Sigrdrífa carves to make Sigurðr love her. The simplest explanation of this conflict of meaning is that *gamanrúnar* was a rare figurative expression which the *Sigrdrífumál* poet knew only from *Hávamál* and misunderstood as referring to a literal piece of runic magic.

The one apparent difficulty about the view that the poet of *Sigrdrífumál* imitates *Hávamál* is the frequency of the expletive particle *um* or *of*. Bjarne Fidjestøl (1999) has shown that in skaldic verse this becomes steadily rarer over time. A few early skaldic poets use it rarely (e.g. Þorbjörn hornklofi), but there is no late poet who uses it often, and no poet later than the early eleventh century whose use of it is greater than the average for the whole corpus.²³ Fidjestøl ([1999], 218–28) suggests that the same dating test may also be applied to eddic verse, although only to give a general suggestion of relative date. A high incidence of the expletive particle might suggest an early date, but a low incidence would not necessarily show that a poem is late. We should also remember that, since the metres of eddic poetry are looser and more easily modified than those of skaldic poetry, the texts we have may often have been modified by performers long after their original composition.

If Jackson is correct in taking *Hávamál* 111–64 as a single poem, one must combine the figures for the expletive particle in what Fidjestøl calls *Hávamál II* (stt. 111–37) and *Hávamál III* (stt. 138–64) before comparing them with those for *Sigrdrífumál*. The results are as follows:

Figure 3.1

Poem	Lines	Average incidence	Actual incidence	Deviation	Deviation per 100 lines
<i>Hávamál</i> (stt. 111–64)	328	7.8	9	+1.2	+0.39
<i>Sigrdrífumál</i>	255	6	10	+4.0	+1.65

This might suggest that *Sigrdrífumál* is older than *Hávamál* 111–64. Admittedly, two of Fidjestøl’s instances in *Sigrdrífumál* seem doubtful: in st. 12,4–5, *þær um vindr*, *þær um vefr*, (‘[one] winds them round, [one] weaves them together’), the particle is probably meaningful, so not expletive. But even if these are discounted, the incidence in *Sigrdrífumál* is 8, the deviation +1.3 and the deviation per 100 lines +0.56.

However, when one looks at exactly *where* the expletive particle appears in *Sigrdrífumál*, it emerges that most instances are concentrated in a very few stanzas. Six (including the two I have questioned) are in the middle sections of the lengthened stt. 12–13, the last two stanzas of the list of types of runic magic. Both these middle sections create grammatical or stylistic problems: a sudden change to an unexplained third person subject in st. 12, and a sudden change of tense with a new, delayed subject in st. 13. These obscurities lead

Sijmons and Gering (SG III.2, 213) to suggest that st. 12,4–6 and st. 13,4–10 probably come from an older poem that is otherwise lost, and this may be correct. Two further instances appear in st. 20, where the giver of gnomic advice is telling the listener to choose whether he wants to hear what she has to say. Again, there is an incongruity, since Sigurðr's reply in st. 21,1–3:

'Munca ec floeia,
þótt mic feigan vitir,
emca ec með bleyði borinn.'

'I shall not draw back
even if you know I am doomed,
I was born without any cowardice.'

suggests that he expects a prophecy about his own future rather than some gnomic advice. It looks as if these two stanzas may have originated in a different context from that in which they appear now. The remaining two instances are both in the 'gnomic advice' section, at 26,6 and 37,6. The latter is the last surviving half-line of the poem, and probably marked the end of its gnomic advice, since the prose paraphrase of this part of *Sigrdrífumál* in *Völsunga saga* ch. 22 includes, in order, all the pieces of advice found in *Sigrdrífumál* but no others. It looks, therefore, as if the poet of *Sigrdrífumál* may have made a habit of quoting short snatches of older verse at the ends of sections of his poem.²⁴ If these 'decorations' are discounted, the background usage of the expletive particle is reduced to one or two instances – well below the expected average for a poem of this length.

The parallel with *Sigrdrífumál* is interesting, and it could even suggest that the combination of gnomic wisdom with practical magic was perceived as generic by the (rather late) poet of *Sigrdrífumál*, but it does not prove that *Loddfáfnismál* and *Ljóðatal* are parts of the same original poem. The striking dichotomy between the Christian-influenced advice in *Loddfáfnismál* and the decisively heathen-looking myth of *Ljóðatal* rather seems to suggest that they are not.

IV. 'Whole Text' Readings

It is perhaps not surprising, in view of the lack of critical consensus about the origins of *Hávamál*, that two important studies – Clunies Ross (1990) and Quinn (1992) – have chosen to ignore the problem of origins and to attempt readings of the text simply as we have it in the Codex Regius (though both are admittedly concerned primarily with other issues). This is self-evidently a valid approach, since the compiler of the present form of the poem, at least, must have envisaged later thirteenth-century readers reading it in this way.

In the course of a more general study of 'voice' in eddic poetry, Clunies Ross uses narratological analysis to point out that the poem consistently implies two

characters: a narrator who assumes the role of an archetypal wise wanderer with supernatural powers, and a 'narratee', sometimes identified as Loddfáfnir, who is assumed to be his human pupil, and who is placed in a succession of imaginary roles, such as the wary guest (st. 7), the greedy man (st. 20), the early riser (st. 59) or the student of runology (stt. 80, 142–43). She also argues that the 'narrative' sections of *Hávamál* (which are of course first-person narrative) serve to identify the narrator as Óðinn, to explain how he gained his wisdom, and to mark a fundamental difference of status between him and the 'narratee'.

This is perceptive and useful as far as it goes, but it does not always work. It probably does not matter that some of the roles envisaged for the 'narratee' are inconsistent with each other (for example, the sensible, taciturn man of st. 6 can hardly be the same person as the drunken, garrulous fool of stt. 21–27). It is, after all, possible to regard the 'narratee' as an Everyman figure, who may be seen as wise on some occasions and foolish on others, or to imagine an audience consisting of several 'narratees', among whom different individuals may be picked out by the narrator at different moments. But we ought at least to expect, if the complete poem had been composed as a consistent whole, that the narrator should remain self-consistent throughout. Clunies Ross discusses one stanza (st. 111) in which this appears not to be the case, and concludes: 'as a sub-divided ego, he (i.e. Óðinn) experiences himself as both subject and object, narrator and actor' (Clunies Ross [1990], 228–29). But this fails to get round the difficulty that the 'narrator' here is evidently a silent recipient of the wise speech of others; and another problem is that the strophe appears to be simultaneously located in two different places, at the seat of the *pulr* by the spring of Urðr (ll. 2–3) and inside Óðinn's hall (ll. 9–10). A similar inconsistency arises in st. 143, where a list of originators of runes begins with *Óðinn með ásom* ('Óðinn among gods') and ends with *ec reist siálfur sumar* ('I carved some myself'). Whoever the speaker is here, he cannot be Óðinn.

Similarly, the passages of mythological narrative, while they certainly identify the narrator as Óðinn, do not always serve to explain the origins of his supernatural wisdom. The first allusion to his theft of the mead of poetry from Gunnlōð (stt. 13–14) has nothing to do with occult wisdom, but is used with what is clearly deliberate bathos to point the obvious lesson that ale is not as good for the sons of men as they say it is (st. 12), so that the best drinking parties are those where one leaves while still in possession of one's senses (st. 14,4–6) – but it needs no god come from Valhøll to tell us this. The story of Óðinn's failed attempt to seduce Billinger's maid (stt. 96–102) seems, rather oddly, to illustrate the immediately preceding statement that no sickness is worse than to be satisfied with nothing (st. 95,4–6), but is more probably an illustration of the sexual unreliability of women in general, which has been stated in st. 84. The second account of the Gunnlōð story (stt. 104–10) seems to form a pair

with this, illustrating the sexual treachery of men towards women that has been stated in st. 91; again, there is nothing supernatural about such worldly-wise cynicism. The narrative of Óðinn's sacrifice of himself on Yggdrasil (stt. 138–41) does explain the origin of his eighteen magic songs (stt. 146–63), but has little to do with the intervening stt. 142–45. Where the narrative sections do relate to parts of the gnomic material, therefore, they are either clearly self-mocking or else are not adjacent to the gnomic material that they verify. One is left with the feeling that narratorial analysis can help us to make the best of a text which still remains less than satisfactory at a number of points.

In an important study of the use of variation in eddic metre to indicate changes of literary register, Judy Quinn argues convincingly that certain metres were traditionally associated with particular kinds of material, and could therefore be used as signals to the audience to indicate what kind of verse they were hearing at any given moment. The metre known as *fornyrðislag* (the metre of ancient deeds), which is common to all the early Germanic languages from which verse survives, is used for impersonal narrative (as in *Prymskviða*) or prophecy (as in *Völuspá*); Quinn shows that the lengthened variant of it known as *málaháttur* 'the metre of formal speeches' cannot be consistently distinguished as a separate metre except in *Atlamál* (Quinn [1992], 102). All the same, Snorri's *Háttatal*²⁵ distinguishes between the two, apparently regarding *málaháttur* as indicating a higher level of formality, and also gives two further variants of *fornyrðislag*: whereas *fornyrðislag* has only one alliterating stress in each odd-numbered line, *Starkaðarlag* has two, while *Bálkarlag* has two and consistently places the main alliterating stress of the couplet on the first syllable of each even-numbered line. The other main eddic metre, *ljóðaháttur*, 'the metre of (magic) songs', has a pair of short lines followed by a long line that alliterates only within itself, and is typically found in stanzas of six lines (that is, two groups of three). It is usually used for gnomic material (sometimes with a specific example in the first half-stanza leading to the statement of a general principle in the second half, as in *Hávamál* 14, or vice versa, as in *Hávamál* 52), and also in dialogues where at least one participant is a supernatural figure (such as the wisdom contests in *Vafþrúðnismál* and *Alvíssmál* and those *sennur* that involve deities, as in *Lokasenna*, or giantesses, as in *Helgakviða Hjörvarðssonar* stt. 12–30) (Quinn [1992], 104–06). *Háttatal* also includes a variant of *ljóðaháttur*, called *galdralag*, 'the metre of magic spells', in which the last odd line of the stanza is replaced by a couplet (see e.g. *Hávamál* 61), and we should perhaps add another, in which there is an extra odd line either in the middle or at the end of the stanza, which I shall call 'variant *galdralag*' (see e.g. *Hávamál* 149). There are also some *ljóðaháttur* stanzas which are lengthened to nine lines (e.g. *Hávamál* 138) or shortened to three (e.g. *Hávamál* 147), and these devices, too, can be used as deliberate metrical ornament.

However, Quinn then proceeds to another kind of variation for which Snorri provides no guide:

Yet there is a related kind of modulation between verse forms that does not seem to imply any change in the speaker's stance, relying instead on the discursive signification already established in the preceding stanzas. Such is the case with the *fornyrðislag* sections within *ljóðaháttir* catechisms which usually occur at a point where an aggregate of items is presented (for example, *Hávamál* 81–83, 85–87, 137, and 144; *Grímnismál* 28, 47–48; and *Sigrdrífumál* 15–17). (Quinn [1992], 111)

One should perhaps add *Hávamál* 89–90 to Quinn's list. The function of all these passages is certainly to give lists, but not all of them are in *fornyrðislag*: *Hávamál* 137 begins with a half-stanza of variant *galdralag* which contains the *Loddfáfnismál* refrain, but follows it with five *fornyrðislag* couplets and an odd line, as if an attempt were being made to produce a monstrous version of a *ljóðaháttir* stanza. *Grímnismál* 28 (part of a list of river-names) consists of three lines of *ljóðaháttir*, four *fornyrðislag* couplets and an odd *ljóðaháttir* line. The second half of *Grímnismál* 47 and the first half of *Grímnismál* 48 (part of the list of Óðinn's names) are best regarded as regular *galdralag*. But it may be significant that these stanzas are often adjacent to others that fulfil the same or similar listing functions and are even more metrically irregular (see *Hávamál* 80, 142–43, 145; *Grímnismál* 27; *Sigrdrífumál* 14, 19). The refined metrical consciousness exemplified in Snorri's work can, as Quinn shows, be used to highlight changes of register between one stanza and the next, but it does not explain wild irregularity within individual stanzas. In a poetic culture that made fine distinctions like those between *fornyrðislag*, *Starkaðarlag* and *Bálkarlag*, there must be a suspicion that some of these oddities result from interpolation or textual corruption rather than from artful changes of register.²⁶ Some changes of metre without changes of function may be due to the same cause, as may passages where a block of lines in a changed metre interrupts a logical sequence in a common metre before and after it. The analysis of changes of metre certainly helps us to see how thirteenth-century readers or hearers might have gained added appreciation from some of the metrical shifts in *Hávamál*, but neither it nor the study of modulations of voice can hide the flaws that remain evident in some parts of the text as we now have it.

V. Strata in *Hávamál*

We are thus driven back to Müllenhoff's idea that the text is an amalgam of more than one original poem, and its sheer length also suggests that this is

likely. Perhaps the most cautious and sensible of the ‘composite’ theories of the poem was put forward by Bjarne Fidjestøl (Fidjestøl [1999], 218), who divided it according to the three points at which the scribe places large capital letters of the sort that he generally uses at the beginnings of poems:

- I. Stt. 1–110 (*‘Hávamál I’*)
- II. Stt. 111–37 (*‘Hávamál II’*)
- III. Stt. 138–64 (*‘Hávamál III’*)

This has the virtue of proceeding only from a piece of objective evidence, though it cannot be certain that the scribe of the Codex Regius knew what the original sections of the text had been. But if he had some idea that his material consisted of more than one poem, it may be useful to consider how these poems came to be blended together. I would suggest that the compilation of the text may have gone through three main periods, whose remains can be seen in different ‘archaeological strata’ within it. Just as a field archaeologist identifies different periods of occupation of a site by identifying sudden changes in soil colour, physical features or artefacts, a philologist may be alerted by abrupt changes in metre, dislocations and contradictions of subject matter, or the interruption of a coherent sequence of thought or narrative which is then resumed. Suspicions may harden into a tenable theory when more than one of these symptoms occurs at the same point. And just as an archaeologist works backwards in time, uncovering the most recent levels first, it seems possible to recognise three ‘levels’ in the development of the text of *Hávamál*:

1. Some lines and stanzas seem designed to impose apparent unity on the whole collection. These emphasise Óðinn as the speaker and add a context for his recitation of the whole collection, but they sometimes disrupt the meaning and symmetry of the passages into which they are interpolated. This stage may have contributed st. 80; st. 111,1–3 and 9–10; st. 162,4–9; and st. 164.
2. Before this, various scraps of verse seem to have been composed or interpolated (rather like ‘running footnotes’) wherever they seemed relevant to topics already under discussion. These stanzas show a common ‘encyclopaedic’ tendency to add mundane detail without regard for metrical consistency or for the artistic form of the poems to which they have been appended. This impulse towards encyclopaedic collection is a characteristic of twelfth- and thirteenth-century learning throughout Europe, and in Old Norse it often manifests itself in the form of poetic lists, like the *þulur* at the end of *Skáldskaparmál* or the composite list of dwarf-names in *Völuspá* 11–16.²⁷ Some of these interpolations may have been made in more than

one stage. I would suggest that the ‘encyclopaedic’ stanzas are stt. 81–83, 85–90, 137 and 142–45.

3. When stages 1 and 2 are removed, a number of more or less complete poems remain; these were presumably grouped together, possibly in oral tradition but probably in a manuscript now lost. Their common feature was that Óðinn was imagined to be the speaker in most or all of them. Each probably began with a large capital letter in the lost manuscript, and three of these capitals (at the beginnings of stt. 1, 111, 138) have been copied into the Codex Regius.²⁸

a) The work of the ‘Editor’

1. St. 80 seems to be made up out of fragments borrowed from elsewhere in *Hávamál*. Its first five lines are related to st. 142, of which they may be an oral variant:

Þat er reynt, er þú at rúnom spyr,
 inom reginkunnum,
 þeim er gorðo ginregin
 oc fáði fimbulpulr, (st. 80,1–5)

It proves true when you ask about
 runes,
 the ones known to the gods,
 which the magic powers made
 and the mighty sage painted,

Rúnar munt þú finna oc ráðna stafi
 miðc stóra stafi, miðc stinna stafi,
 er fáði fimbulpulr
 og gorðo ginregin
 oc reist hropr ragna. (st. 142)

You must find runes and meaningful
 signs
 very strong signs, very firm signs
 which the mighty sage painted
 and the magic powers made
 and Hropr of the gods carved.

This is then combined with a single line about the value of keeping quiet which resembles the advice offered to the fool in st. 27,1–3:

Þá hefir hann balt, ef hann þegir.
 (st. 80,6)

He will grasp them best if he keeps
 quiet.

Ósnotr,
 er með alda kōmr
 þat er balt, at hann þegi; (st. 27,1–3)

When the fool comes among people,
 It is best that he should keep quiet;

The awkward switch of subject from ‘you’ to ‘he’ may be due to the different contexts from which the two parts of this stanza have been taken. The

‘editor’ may have felt a need to associate all the major ‘wisdom’ sections of his collection with the esoteric knowledge connected with runes, and the advice to keep quiet, which in st. 27 is given to the fool, may have been imported in order to link st. 80 with st. 79, which also begins with a formula about the foolish man.

2. If the Odinic references were removed, st. 111 would become a regular *ljóðaháttir* stanza in which an unidentified human speaker tells how he listened to advice.

Sá ec oc þagðac,	I saw and kept silent,
sá ec oc hugðac,	I saw and I thought,
hlýdda ec á manna mál;	I listened to people’s speeches;
of rúnar heyrða ec dæma,	I heard secrets discussed,
né um ráðom þogðo,	they did not keep silent about advice;
heyrða ec segia svá:	what I heard said was as follows:
(Hávamál 111,4–8, 11)	

This would make a good, well-shaped opening for an advice poem (though not necessarily one in which Óðinn was the speaker), and may have been the original beginning of *Loddfáfnismál* (Müllenhoff’s poem IV); in that case, the speaker could be Loddfáfnir, and the refrain would refer to the advice he has received. The editor seems to have added five lines to this opening stanza, of which 1–3 associate what follows with Óðinn by giving the sage a seat by the well of Fate:

Mál er at þylia	It is time to chant
þular stóli á,	in the seat of the sage
Urðar brunni at	at the well of Fate

The *þulr* may be intended to be Óðinn, as Clunies Ross has argued, but he is clearly not the speaker, and it is idle to speculate about how he comes to have a seat beside the well. The allusion to *Urðarbrunnr* was probably suggested by the reference to Yggdrasill, the Tree of Fate, in st. 138. But lines 10–11:

Háva hóllo at,	at the High One’s hall,
Háva hóllo í	inside the High One’s hall

are apparently elaborated from *Háva hóllo í* (st. 109,4). They introduce a further problem in the form of a second location (inside Óðinn’s hall) which is inconsistent with the first one; the repetition seems designed to associate

the following advice with Óðinn and to link some of the separate parts of the text together.²⁹

3. St. 162 also looks disturbed. The first three lines contain the seventeenth of Óðinn's eighteen magic spells; they make good sense as a stanza on their own. There then follow a couplet and four odd lines which seem to be elaborated from the refrain of *Loddfáfnismál*. The simplest explanation of these is that the editor has added them to link this section to a preceding one, but has mistakenly inserted them in the wrong place, before instead of after the last magic spell. If this is correct, the editor was probably already working with a manuscript in front of him, since such a mistake would not arise in oral performance but might well do so on parchment.
4. St. 164,2 echoes the phrase *Háva hóllo í* from st. 109,4 and st. 111,10, and this stanza was most likely composed by the editor to round off the whole text, though some lines of it may be derived from the original *Loddfáfnismál*.

In general, the 'editor' seems determined to associate the whole text with Óðinn, and we should not automatically follow him in doing so for every part of it. The stanzas that I have associated with the 'editorial' stage of the poem's development are all metrically irregular, and three of them also produce problems of content (an awkward change of grammatical subject in st. 80; two locations and an inconsistent narrator in st. 111; comment in st. 163,4–9 on a list of spells that is not yet complete). In each case, removing the interpolated material also removes the metrical oddity and the logical difficulty (assuming that st. 163 was originally a half-stanza; as the second-last of Óðinn's eighteen magic spells, it forms a symmetrical pair with the second spell, st. 147, which is also half the normal length).

b. The 'encyclopaedic' stratum

Any stanzas attributed to the second, 'encyclopaedic' stage must be assumed to have been added for a reason, usually, it seems, the desire to develop further a theme which has been touched on in the preceding stanzas. I would suggest that the 'encyclopaedic' stanzas are:

1. A list of things which one should approve only when they are complete, or of which one should take immediate advantage because they are unlikely to be available for long (stt. 81–83). Unlike the preceding *ljóðaháttir* stanzas (1–79), this is in a form of *málaháttir* (or possibly, as Quinn suggests, rather heavy *fornyrðislag*). It looks like an addition which has been 'hooked on' to the theme of mutability in some of the preceding stanzas, especially stt. 76–78. If we ignore the 'editorial' st. 80, it may have been

placed after instead of before st. 79 by mistake, in which case we must again assume that this interpolation was made in a manuscript rather than in oral performance.

2. A composite list of things not to be trusted (stt. 85–87 and 89–90 are in *fornyrðislag*, while st. 88, in *ljóðahátttr*, looks like a secondary addition in the same vein, since the change of metre here does not signal any change in content). This ‘theme of unreliability’ has probably been added to expand on the statement of the unreliability of women in st. 84. As Quinn points out, stt. 85–87 contain no verb, and in their present position they depend on the phrase *scyli mangi trúa* ‘no one should trust’ (st. 84,2). However, if we regard st. 88 as a secondary interpolation (as its different metre suggests), the whole *málahátttr* list up to the end of st. 89 leads up to the emphatic:

verðit maðr svá tryggr,

at þesso trúi ǫllo. (*Hávamál* 89,7–8)

let no one be so credulous

as to trust in all these.

The postponement of this single main verb is an effective rhetorical device, and if stt. 85–87 and 89 are read in this way, they may have existed as an independent fragment before they were appended to st. 84 and st. 88 was added to them. St. 90 begins a new rhetorical structure, in which a beautiful but deceitful woman is compared with a list of other unreliable things, and it might be another secondary interpolation, but as there is no change of metre at this point, this must be regarded as no more than a possibility.

The interpolation of stt. 85–90 obscures a clear and elegant balance between st. 84 (on the fickleness of women towards men) and st. 91 (on the deceitfulness of men towards women), and this theme is maintained until st. 110. It is clearly different from the gnomic material of stt. 1–79, although the heavy interpolation of this sequence of stanzas obscures the beginning of the ‘sexual comedy’ poem; this may explain why the Codex Regius scribe does not begin st. 84 with an enlarged initial.

3. A list of medical remedies (st. 137), added to the end of the generally ethical advice in the *ljóðahátttr* stanzas of *Loddfáfnismál*, but mechanically re-using the refrain of that poem (on its metre, see above). Since this begins with what seems to be a remedy against accidentally poisoned ale (see Evans [1986], 131), it may take its cue from the warning in st. 131,7 to beware of excessive drinking. Alternatively, since the preceding stanzas are mainly concerned with the treatment that should be given to needy visitors (stt. 132, 135–36), it may have been prompted by the thought that one reason for such visitations is the need for medical help. At all events, this stanza

is markedly different in both metre and content from the moral advice that precedes it and the mythological narrative that follows.

4. A probably composite fragment of advice about runes and heathen sacrifice. Stt. 142–43 are in a metrical form which cannot really be identified: each consists of a couplet like the beginning of a *ljóðaháttir* strophe, followed by an inflated number of odd lines (five in st. 142, three in st. 143). St. 144 is a repetitive, incantatory series of questions in *fornyrðislag* or *galdralag*. St. 145 begins with five lines of a *ljóðaháttir* stanza, but where we would expect a closing aphorism in the sixth line there is a full stop, followed by two couplets of *fornyrðislag* whose content is unrelated to what precedes them.

There is also a dislocation of the narrating voice in these stanzas. There is no doubt that the imagined speaker of stt. 138–41 is Óðinn, who says he was

geiri undaðr	wounded with a spear
oc gefinn Óðni,	and given to Óðinn,
siálfr siálfom mér	myself to myself

(*Hávamál* 138,4–6).

But in st. 143 both Óðinn and *ec ... siálfr* ‘I myself’ are listed among the originators of runes, so they must be distinct characters. Óðinn is also referred to in the third person (as *Pundr*) in st. 145,6. Ottar Grønvik (1999 and 2000) has suggested that the speaker throughout is a shaman-priest of Óðinn who uses his suffering on the tree to achieve a mystic union with the god he worships; but this religious idea relies on a tradition of Christian mysticism based on meditation on canonical scriptures (which Old Norse heathenism did not have), which was not widely known in northern Europe until the thirteenth century, and which did not surface in English and German vernacular works such as *The Cloud of Unknowing* until the fourteenth.³⁰ It is also doubtful whether Óðinn can properly be regarded as a shamanistic figure, either here or elsewhere.³¹

To these problems we must add a severe disruption of content. Whereas stt. 138–41 and 146–63 form a complete and coherent account of the mythological experience of Óðinn himself and the mysterious magic spells he learned in the world of the dead, stt. 142–43 are concerned with the practicalities and origins of runes. They have probably been added to expand on the statement *nam ec upp rúnar* (st. 139,4); in this context, *rúnar* is best translated ‘secrets’, since it is clearly oral spells that Óðinn learns immediately afterwards (st. 140), but the interpolator has understood them as written inscriptions. Stt. 144 and 145,1–5 turn to the practical human concern of how to make heathen sacrifice, though they are in different metres and

reflect rather different outlooks: st. 144 is concerned with how esoteric runic knowledge and heathen worship should be practised, while st. 145,1–5 express the view that it is better not to worship the gods at all than to do so too much. After this, there is a sudden switch into *fornyrðislag* third-person narrative of how Þundr (i.e. Óðinn) carved inscriptions for the fates of peoples when he returned from the dead (st. 145,6–9), and this seems to have little connection either with what precedes or with the list of magic songs that follows. This seems less like change of register than confusion arising from the collection and insertion of a disparate jumble of fragments of oral folk poetry. On the other hand, when stt. 142–45 are removed, the words and deeds, each of which found out the next for Óðinn (st. 141,4–7) lead directly into the first of the eighteen spells, which are the material to which they refer.

c. *The main poems*

When we remove the material in the two later ‘strata’ of the text, there remains the problem of how many ‘original’ poems there were. I would suggest that there were four:

- A. The Gnostic Poem (roughly stt. 1–79)
- B. The Poem of Sexual Intrigue (stt. 84; 91–110)
- C. *Loddfáfnismál* ‘Advice to (or ‘Sayings of’) Loddfáfnir’ (stt. 111,4–8 and 11; stt. 112–36)
- D. *Ljóðatal* ‘List of Magic Spells’ (stt. 138–41; 146–61; 162,1–3; 163).

It seems probable that when these were first collected together in written form, each began with an enlarged capital in a manuscript that was the ancestor of the Codex Regius. Three of these enlarged capitals have been copied into the surviving, interpolated manuscript. The fourth, at the beginning of *Hávamál B*, may have been lost because the interpolated material all round it now obscured the beginning of a new section of the text. The Poem of Sexual Intrigue and *Ljóðatal* will be the subjects of the next two essays in this book, but I will conclude this paper with a few observations about the Gnostic Poem and *Loddfáfnismál*.

The Gnostic Poem

Stt. 1–79 are loosely structured, and we cannot be certain that all these stanzas are of the same age or origin, though some sequences clearly belong together.

Thus stt. 6–15 are mainly concerned with how a sensible guest should behave, and are contrasted with stt. 16–17 and 19–27, which concern various kinds of foolishness. Stt. 41–47 are mainly on the theme of friendship. Sometimes the themes and expression of non-adjacent stanzas make them look as if they may have been associated with each other in oral performance (for example, st. 1, on the need to be prepared for enemies when one enters a hall, might have been put alongside st. 38, on the need to have one's weapons about one at all times; and st. 79, on the reaction of the fool to good fortune, seems to adapt the opening formula of stt. 23–27). Stt. 76 and 77 may even be variants of the same traditional stanza.

However, in terms of voice and attitude, the Gnostic Poem seems reasonably consistent. Although most stanzas present only a third-person description of someone in a typical situation, the narrator jocularly identifies himself as Óðinn when he recalls how drunk he got when visiting Gunnlǫð (stt. 13–14). Other uses of the first-person pronoun do not obviously refer to Óðinn and sometimes seem more appropriate to an experienced human traveller, but none of them is actually incompatible with the god as speaker, though one seems rather unlike him:

Ungr var ec forðom,
fór ec einn saman,
þá varð ec villr vega;
auðigr þóttomz,
er ec annan fann,
maðr er mannz gaman.

Once I was young.
I travelled alone,
then I went astray in my ways;
I thought myself rich
when I found someone else –
mankind is the joy of man.

(*Hávamál* 47)

Unlike Þórr, Óðinn is usually portrayed as one who travels alone, and he typically appears as an old man, while these words seem more appropriate to an experienced human Everyman figure.³² The second-person pronoun produces fewer problems, since the person addressed can be consistently assumed to be the less experienced recipient of the narrator's advice (see stt. 19 and 44–46). Most importantly, however, the viewpoint from which the advice is given remains consistently practical, amoral and unheroic; for example, 'the live man always gets the cow' (st. 70,3) and 'no one has any use for a corpse' (st. 71,6).

The Gnostic Poem is also quite consistent metrically. *Galdralag* is used in the first half of st. 1, the second half of st. 61, as a half-length stanza by itself in st. 73 (though this could be regarded as an interpolated quatrain of *fornyrðislag*) (Evans [1986], 109), and variant *galdralag* in the first half of st. 74. Stt. 6,

27 have nine lines each, and st. 65 only three. But all of these are among the metrical variations for deliberate effect discussed above, and in some cases there is an obvious literary point: in st. 1, the use of *galdralag* suggests the supernatural mystique of the speaker; st. 6 opens a new theme (how the responsible guest should behave); and st. 27 is the end of the section about the fool. The unexpected shortening of st. 65 may be a joke; since its subject-matter is the potentially serious consequences of what one says to other people, the implication may be that the less the narrator says to other people (that is, his audience), the safer he is likely to remain.

The date of the Gnostic Poem is hard to estimate (if it is all of one period). Adapting Fidjestøl's calculations for the incidence of the expletive particle to stt. 1–79, one gets the following figures:

Figure 3.2

Poem	Lines	Average incidence	Actual incidence	Deviation	Deviation per 100 lines
<i>Hávamál</i> A	478	12.5	15	+2.5	+0.57

This might suggest that the poem is rather early. There may be an echo of st. 76 or st. 77 in Eyvindr skáldaspillir's *Hákonarmál*, a funeral lay composed for King Hákon the Good ca. 962–65:

Deyr fé,
deyja frændr,
eyðisk land ok lád;
(*Hákonarmál* 21,1–3)

Deyr fé,
deyia frændr,
deyr síálfr it sama;
(*Hávamál* 76/77,1–3)

Cattle die,
kinsmen die,
land and people become desolate;

Cattle die,
kinsmen die,
the self dies in the same way;

In a lay of praise composed for a funeral feast, it seems probable that Eyvindr also expected his audience to bear in mind the second half of one or both of these stanzas of *Hávamál* (which may be oral variants of each other):

enn orðztírr
deyr aldregi,
hveim er sér góðan getr.
(*Hávamál* 76,4–6)

but reputation
never dies
for the man who gets a good one.

ec veit einn,
at aldri deyr:
dómr um dauðan hvern.

(*Hávamál* 77,4–6)

I know one thing
that never dies:
the fame of each dead man.

This suggests that some version of stanzas 76–77 probably already existed in the later tenth century, but it is not possible to say whether it was already part of an oral text that resembled the Gnostic Poem or merely a floating poetic aphorism.

Loddfáfnismál

The tone and narrative viewpoint of this loosely co-ordinated gnostic poem are quite different from those of the Gnostic Poem. Apart from what looks like a clumsy editorial attempt to identify the narrator with Óðinn in st. 111 (see above), the speaker is an unidentified man (possibly called Loddfáfnir) who has kept quiet and listened to the words of other people (st. 111,4–6). Apart from the repeated *Ráðomc þér* of the refrain, the first person appears only twice more, in the *ec sá* ‘I have seen’ formula of st. 118 (compare stt. 70, 78), and when the speaking voice gives the rather two-edged advice to be cautious but not too cautious (st. 131,5–6). The emphasis here is more on the person to whom advice is being given, and the second-person pronoun appears in almost every stanza (only stt. 118, 124 and 133 are cast in the third-person mode that dominates the Gnostic Poem, and none of them begin with the ‘Loddfáfnir’ refrain). The nature of the advice is also different: in the Gnostic Poem, any ‘moral’ advice that is offered is usually given a pragmatic, selfish motive, but in *Loddfáfnismál* some of it seems to be motivated by a quasi-Christian ethical sense (see e.g. stt. 128 ‘never rejoice at another’s misfortune’, 135 ‘don’t drive away guests, and treat the poor well’).

The metre of *Loddfáfnismál* is more irregular than that of the other main sections of *Hávamál*. Some of its deviations from regular *ljóðaháttir* may represent deliberate variation, though I cannot detect much artfulness in them. The ‘Loddfáfnir’ refrain is prefaced to five stanzas that would already be complete without it (stt. 117, 119, 121, 126 and 130), and six others lack it (stt. 114, 118, 123, 124, 133, 136, although in 114, 123 and possibly 133 this is because a thought is carried on from the previous stanza). The second half of st. 124 is in *galdralag* and the second half of st. 125 in variant *galdralag*. But three stanzas deviate more radically from the standard form of *ljóðaháttir*: in st. 129 there is an extra couplet in the second half; the second half of st. 131 is in *galdralag* but with an extra couplet; and most radically, st. 134 consists of the refrain

followed by three couplets and three odd lines. Some or all of these irregularities could result from textual corruption or interpolation, although in the absence of any breakdown of sense, this cannot be demonstrated.

It is by no means certain that all of *Loddfáfnismál* shares the same origin, but the evidence of the expletive particle, such as it is, suggests a relatively late date for the poem:

Figure 3.3

Poem	Lines	Average incidence	Actual incidence	Deviation	Deviation per 100 lines
<i>Hávamál</i> C	201	5.0	2	-3	-1.50

This rate of usage is the sixth rarest in the Poetic Edda, and the generally Christian tone of the advice given may support the idea that *Loddfáfnismál* is of rather recent origin (though it is probably earlier than *Sigrdrífumál*, see above).

NOTES

- Hávamál* has 164 stanzas; the next longest eddic poems (*Atlamál* and *Sigurðarkviða in skamma*) consist of 105 and 71 stanzas respectively.
- For surveys of critical opinions up to the mid 1980's, see Evans (1986), 8–35, Harris (1985), 107–11 and 147–48. Although there has been much disagreement about the origins of *Hávamál*, even von See (1972a), 1–2 accepts that it was compiled using some pre-existing (oral) poetic material, not all of which has been successfully integrated into the whole.
- See Jackson (1994), 35, footnote 2; Dr. Jackson notes in a letter to me that the capital beginning st. 111 is smaller than the other two, and suggests that it may not have been intended to be significant; but as Richard North points out (1991), 126, it is set into the margin and spaced apart from the letters that follow it. The capitals at the beginnings of stt. 1 and 138 are three and two lines deep respectively.
- See N-K 34, 40; all quotations from eddic poems are taken from this edition. For a list of the paper manuscripts, see Boer (1922), Einleitung IX.
- For the text of *Hugsvinnsmál*, see *Skj.* II B, 185–210; *SPSMA* VII, 358–449.
- See Dronke (1969), 214–17 for its probable use in the skaldic verse of Torf-Einarr (ca. 890).
- See Dronke (1969), 42–45; *Atlakviða*'s use of *valhǫll* as a common noun meaning

- ‘exotic hall’ (*Akv.* 2,3 and 14,11) suggests a date earlier than the adoption of the word as the name of the mythological hall of Óðinn, a sense first found in *Eiríksmál* 1,3 (attributed to ca. 954, *Skj.* I B, 164; Kock I, 89).
- 8 Further on both sides of this argument, see Evans (1989), Hermann Pálsson (1990), Köhne (1983), Larrington (1991 and 1993) and von See (1975, 1978, 1987 and 1989).
 - 9 For example. ‘*Fronte capillata*: Possumus autem per capillas divitias intellegere’ (‘*With hair in front*: we can, though, understand “hair” to mean wealth’); see Ruggerini (1988), 264.
 - 10 Ruggerini (1988) also suggests that *Hávamál* (or at least the Gnostic Poem, or parts of it) might have been influenced by *DC* directly, though only by its first two books, perhaps through their use as a Latin school text.
 - 11 *Gylfaginning* ch. 2 (ed. Faulkes [1982], 8; trans. Faulkes [1987a], 8).
 - 12 It has often been dated to the thirteenth century – see Ruggerini (1988), 222 for a summary of critical opinions – but could be later. For its detailed indebtedness to *DC*, see also Alexander (1931).
 - 13 *Diplomatarium Islandicum* IV, 111; Hermann Pálsson (1985), 16.
 - 14 Hermann Pálsson (1985), 16.
 - 15 For this view, see also Fjeldstøl (1992), 5; Köhne (1983), 383. Hermann Pálsson (1985), 23 suggests that the relationship between *Háv.* and *Hgsv.* is more complex, and that each may have influenced the other.
 - 16 See also Ruggerini (1988), 237–44.
 - 17 I would like to thank Dr. Jackson for the warm generosity with which she has shared her ideas with me, despite my disagreement with her.
 - 18 Compare *Völsunga saga* ch. 21, *FSN* I, 45; ch. 22 in trans. Byock (1990), 71–72.
 - 19 Further on these correspondences (and the related list of magic charms in *Svipdagsmál*), see the table in McKinnell (2005), 216–17.
 - 20 Compare the nine mighty songs of *Hávamál* 140, the eighteen magic songs of *Hávamál* 146–63, and the nine charms chanted by Gróa for her son Svipdagr in *Svipdagsmál*.
 - 21 In the Apocalypse alone there are seven churches (1.4), seven stars and seven candlesticks (2.1), seven spirits of God (4.5), seven seals (5.1), seven trumpets (8.6) and seven plagues (ch. 16).
 - 22 For a brief summary in English of the arguments of Mundal and Myhren, see McKinnell (2005), 211. Further on the story-pattern, see McKinnell (2005), 200–17.
 - 23 Fjeldstøl (1999), 215; the latest poet whose work shows higher than average use of it is Óttarr svarti, one of the poets of Knútr inn ríki (King of England 1016–35 and of Denmark 1014–35). Some skaldic stanzas have probably been spuriously attributed to an earlier period than their actual dates, but I ignore that problem here,

- because the consistency of Fidjestøl's results suggests that these are probably a small enough minority to be statistically insignificant except in a few special cases.
- 24 A similar practice can occasionally be seen in skaldic poetry, e.g. in Arnórr jarlaskáld's *Þorfinnsdrápa* 22, where Whaley (1998), 265–66 points out clear echoes of *Völuspá* 41 and 57, and in Hallfreðr vandræðaskáld's *erfidrápa* for Óláfr Tryggvason (*Skj.* I B, 150–63; Kock I, 82–85).
- 25 For Snorri's discussion of Eddic metres, see *Háttatal* 95–102, ed. Faulkes (1991), 37–39; trans. Faulkes (1987), 217–20. The earlier collection of metres in Rognvaldr kali's *Háttalykill* ('Key to Metres', mid-twelfth century) seems to begin with *ljóðahátt*, *fornyrðislag* and *málahátt*, though the text is damaged, see *Skj.* I B, 487–89; Kock I, 239.
- 26 For this view, see also Evans (1986), 8, 34.
- 27 Interpolated expansions of poetic lists may also account for the metrical irregularities in *Grímnismál* and *Sigrdrífumál* (see above), but poetic lists can sometimes be part of a poem's design, as in the lists of names of offspring in *Rígsþula* 12–13, 24–25 and 41; these could have been expanded to some degree, but the absence of any serious disruption to their argument or metre means that there is no reason to suppose this.
- 28 North (1991), 122 also proposes what amounts to a stratigraphic analysis, but suggests that two original poems (comprising stt. 1–79 and 112–64) were combined by an editor who contributed st. 80 before a further reviser contributed stt. 96–110 (on Óðinn's sexual adventures). This reconstruction of a gnomic 'core' for *Hávamál* is an interesting idea, but its detail seems odd, and it fails to account for stt. 81–95 and 111, or to deal with the logical and metrical problems associated with stt. 137, 142–45 and 162.
- 29 Further on the problems connected with this stanza, see Evans (1986), 26–27.
- 30 See Hodgson (1973), lii–lxix, especially lviii. Further, see essay 5 in the present volume.
- 31 See Fleck (1971c) and more fully Tolley (2009), especially ch. 4.
- 32 Of the other first-person references, two could refer more specifically to Óðinn, though both are enigmatic: st. 49, where he says he gave his clothes to two *trémenn*, and stt. 66–67, where he says he has often been an unwelcome guest (possibly of giants?). Four relate to exemplary sights or experiences: stt. 39, 'I have never met a man so generous that he wouldn't accept a gift'; st. 52, 'with half a loaf and a tilted cup I got myself a companion'; st. 70, 'I've seen a fire burning for a rich man when he was lying dead outside the doors'; st. 78, 'I've seen the pens of Fitjungr's sons full of animals, but now they are beggars' (though Evans [1986], 113 suggests that this may refer to a historical and political event). One is probably proverbial: st. 73, 'I expect a hand inside every cloak'.

4 *Hávamál B*: A Reconstructed Poem of Sexual Intrigue

I. The Unity and Structure of *Hávamál B*

In studying what I have called ‘The Poem of Sexual Intrigue’ or ‘*Hávamál B*’, it is first necessary to show that *Hávamál A* (the Gnostic Poem, stt. 1–79) and *Hávamál B* are distinct from each other. Both are in the same metre (*ljóðahát-tr*), but the similarity ends there. *Hávamál B* has a single theme – sexual treachery – and is neatly structured to introduce two narrative episodes about named individuals, each consisting of six narrative stanzas and one summarising stanza. *Hávamál A*, by contrast, is discursive and loosely structured, covering many themes and focussing on pragmatic advice. It rarely alludes to specific stories (see the end of the previous essay), and it never sustains a narrative for more than the length of a single stanza. Where it does conjure up a semi-narrative situation, it is usually a typical one, e.g.:

Ósnotr maðr
hyggr sér alla vera
viðhlæiendr vini;
þá þat finnr,
er at þingi kómr,
at hann á formælendr fá.

(*Hávamál* 25)

The unwise man
thinks that all
who laugh with him are friends;
then he finds,
when he gets to the assembly,
he has few to speak in his favour.

Only one myth – that of Óðinn and Gunnlōð – is alluded to in both poems, and they treat it in radically different ways. In *Hávamál A* (stt. 12–14) it becomes a rather frivolous warning against excessive drunkenness, while in *Hávamál B* (stt. 104–10) it illustrates the sexual treachery of men towards women. This theme is not handled at all in *Hávamál A*, where the only stanza that mentions

the love of women (st. 79) links it with money, as just another asset which the fool never acquires the common sense to use effectively.¹

Hávamál B also shows some specialised use of words in senses different from those found elsewhere in *Hávamál*. One example is the adjective *horskr* 'sensible' (91,6; 93,4; 94,4; 96,5; 102,8) and synonyms for it (*snotr* 'wise', 95,5; *ráðspaca* 'the resourceful woman', 102,5; *sviðr* 'shrewd', 103,3; *margfróðr* 'wise in many things' 103,5), which in this part of *Hávamál* are used only in senses related to sexuality. Applied to a woman, they always refer to her caution in dealing with wooers (91,6; 96,5; 102,8; and compare *ráðspaca*, 102,5). When they refer to men, they are used either to contrast an intelligent man's wisdom about other matters with his folly in love (93,4; 94,4; and compare *snotr* 95,5), or to introduce the fluent and unprincipled wooer under cover of apparently harmless aphorisms (103,3; 103,5). The three instances of *horskr* in *Hávamál A* (6,4; 20,5; 63,3) all refer to the social wisdom by which a man knows when to speak and when to stay silent, and these probably represent a more usual use of the same aphorisms. In short, the use of *horskr* and its synonyms seems to be adapted by the poet of *Hávamál B* to the particular and restricted meaning of 'clever in dealing with the opposite sex'.

A similar specialisation occurs with the verb *njóta* 'to use, enjoy' in the Gunnlōð episode (107,2; 108,4). *Njóta* appears in *Hávamál A* in the statement that no one has any use for a corpse (71,6), and in the refrain to *Hávamál C* (*Loddfáfnismál*, e.g. 112,3) it is connected with the potential usefulness of specific pieces of (mainly moral) advice. But the two cases in *Hávamál B* are quite different from either of these. The first governs the obscure genitive phrase *vel keyptz litar*, which may refer to a magical transformation by which Óðinn gives himself a handsome appearance for use in his seduction of Gunnlōð.² The second refers to his cynical use of her love for him in his escape from the giants' dwellings. Both imply the sense 'to exploit (someone or something) for sexual purposes or by using sex as a weapon' and both suggest a determination to profit at the expense of the sexual partner.

The next obvious question is why one should regard Müllenhoff's poems II and III (the episodes of *Billings mær* and Gunnlōð) as parts of a single *ljóðaháttr* poem, together with stt. 84 and 91–94. When the encyclopaedic list of things not to be trusted is removed (see the preceding essay), st. 91, on the subject of male falsity to women, follows immediately and naturally after the statement about female inconstancy in st. 84. However, this sequence implies that the following poem will concern the falseness of *both* sexes to each other. The tale of *Billings mær* (stt. 96–102) illustrates the female unreliability stated in st. 84, but the statement of male perfidy in st. 91 remains irrelevant until it is illustrated in the story of Gunnlōð.

This balanced structure is emphasised by the device of framing. The first and last stanzas of *Hávamál B* begin with negative statements involving the verb *trúa* ‘to trust’ (See Appendix for this and the other detailed patterns in the text):

Meyiar orðom	The words of a girl
scyli mangi trúa,	no one should trust,
né því er qveðr kona;	nor in what a woman says;
(<i>Hávamál</i> 84,1–3)	

Baugeið Óðinn	An oath on the ring
hygg ec at unnit hafi,	I think Óðinn has sworn –
hvat scal hans trygðom trúa?	how can his oaths be trusted?
(<i>Hávamál</i> 110,1–3)	

The verb *trúa* appears nine times in *Hávamál* as a whole, but these are the only two instances where it refers to misplaced trust in the truthfulness of what someone says.

A similar device can be seen at the beginning of the poem and in the coda at the end of the episode of Billingsr’s maid, in the use of the noun *brigð* ‘inconstancy’ (84,6) and the feminine adjective *hugbrigð* ‘fickle in mind’ (102,3). This is also used to make a link with the parallel theme of male inconstancy (91,3), where it is again used with the noun *hugr* ‘mind’. The episode of Billingsr’s maid itself is similarly ‘framed’ at beginning and end with the idea of ‘testing’ a preceding general statement:

96,1: Þat ec þá reynda / er

102,4: þá ec þat reynda / er ...³

and the three mentions of the giant Suttungr are used in an analogous way to begin and end the Gunnlōð story (104,6; 109,7; 110,4).

But even if both narrative episodes are admitted to be part of the same poem, Finnur Jónsson (1920–24), I, 235 and David Evans (ed., 1986), 24 both reject some stanzas which I have included in it. Finnur would omit stt. 92, 94 and 95 from the poem about Billingsr’s maid (but does not explain why). Evans suggests omitting stt. 94 and 95, arguing that the opening statement of st. 96: (‘I proved that when I sat in the reeds’) ought to refer, not to the aphorism that no sickness is worse than lack of contentment, but to the irresistible power of love and the deceitfulness of women. He therefore thinks that st. 96 should be immediately preceded either by st. 84 (on the deceitfulness of women) or by st. 93 (on how intelligent men are susceptible to the good looks of women). But

the sequence in the text makes perfectly good sense, as an illustration of the frustration and humiliation of rejected desire. The argument runs:

‘No sickness is worse than an obsessive love which prevents one from taking pleasure in anything else (95,4–6). I proved that for myself when I sat in the reeds, waiting fruitlessly for the woman I desired (st. 96). The man in love desires only one thing, and without it he could not even enjoy the status of being a jarl (97,4–6)’.

The ‘Poem of Óðinn’s Sexual Intrigues’ survives in a form complete enough for us to be able to recognise a purposeful and elegant structure in it. This falls into three main sections:

- A: Theme: the deceit of both sexes and the folly of love (5 stanzas):
 - i) the unreliability of women (1 stanza, st. 84);
 - ii) the unreliability of men (2 stanzas, stt. 91–92);
 - iii) the folly of love, balanced against its irresistibility, seen from a male point of view) (2 stanzas, stt. 93–94).
- B: Woman as deceiver (8 stanzas):
 - i) gnomic (or mock-gnomic?) introduction (1 stanza, st. 95);
 - ii) the story of Billinger’s maid (6 stanzas, stt. 96–101);
 - iii) coda: comment and final snapshot scene (1 stanza, st. 102).
- C: Man as deceiver (8 stanzas):
 - i) gnomic (or ironic?) introduction (1 stanza, st. 103);
 - ii) the story of Gunnlōð (6 stanzas, stt. 104–09);
 - iii) coda: comment and final snapshot scene (1 stanza, st. 110).

The tone is light and sometimes self-mocking, with an air of cynical balance which implies that both men and women behave either as exploiters or as fools and that they are as bad as each other. This poet is treating Óðinn and the giantesses as if they were all human beings – and that may have implications for the date and meaning that we attach to the poem.

II. Dating

The most objective evidence for the date of any eddic poem is that provided by its language, but such evidence is often slight. However, one linguistic test that may perhaps be applied to *Hávamál B* is the frequency of the ‘expletive particle’ *um* or *of*, which seems to become progressively less over time (see

the preceding essay, section 3). There are nine examples of it in the 134 lines of *Hávamál B*: *um lagit* (84,6); *um vakin* (100,3); *of vítaðr* (100,6); *um kominn* (101,2); *um sofin* (101,3); *um kominn* (104,2); *um gaf* (105,1); *um fá* (106,2); *of sóit* (109,6), where the expected average number of cases would be only 3.5. Fidjestøl (1999), 214 warns that short poems can produce statistical freaks, and employs a complex statistical formula to mitigate this; but even allowing for this, this test would place *Hávamál B* among the five or six oldest eddic poems, with statistics very comparable to those of *Vafþrúðnismál*. However, it may also be worth noticing that eight of these nine cases of the expletive particle are in the twelve ‘story’ stanzas, with only one in the other nine (in the possibly proverbial st. 84,6: *brigð í brióst um lagit* ‘(and) deceit lodged in their breasts’).

A second linguistic test concerns the West Norse change by which the initial consonant combination *vr-* was simplified to *r-*. West Norse skaldic poets ceased to use alliterations that depend on the *vr-* pronunciation just before the year 1000, and Fidjestøl (1999), 245 cautiously concludes that in eddic poetry too, the presence of alliteration between *r-* and original *vr-* indicates West Norse origin after ca. 900, while *vr-* alliteration with *v-* shows either East Norse origin or a date before ca. 1000. *Hávamál B* shows only one relevant form:

106,1–2: Rata munn
létomc rúms um fá

The auger’s mouth
I caused to make room for me

Rati ‘auger’ is related to the Old Danish *vraade* ‘to bore a hole’, and thus shows original *vr-* alliterating with the original *r-* of *rúms* (see de Vries [1977], 434). For what it is worth, this suggests that the poem (or at least the Gunnloð episode) dates from after ca. 900 and is of West Norse origin.

The linguistic evidence (such as it is) therefore suggests a date around the later tenth century, but nearly all of it is derived from the twelve narrative stanzas. A radically different impression emerges, however, when we consider the possible links between *Hávamál B* and other literary works. Admittedly, some such links must be regarded as due either to the influence of *Hávamál B* on other works or to common echoes of proverbial phrases. The second half of st. 84 is quoted in *Fóstbræðra saga* ch. 21 (ed. Björn K. Þórólfsson and Guðni Jónsson [1943], ÍF 6, 225) by a man supposed to have been speaking in Greenland in the early eleventh century, but this proves only that these lines were known in Iceland when the saga was written, probably about 1260 (see Jónas Kristjánsson [1972], 292–310 and 325–26). Similarly, st. 108,6 is ironically echoed (and salaciously distorted) in *Lokasenna*:

oc þú lagðir lær yfir

and you laid a thigh over

(*Lokasenna* 20,6)

þeirar er lögðomc arm yfir

whom I laid my arm over

(*Hávamál B* 108,6).

Hávamál B must surely be the source here, but most recent critics have regarded *Lokasenna* as a poem of the later twelfth or even the early thirteenth century (see for example, ed. Ruggerini [1979], 154–62). If this dating is correct, this link provides no evidence in favour of an early dating for *Hávamál B*.⁴

Other critics have argued that *Hávamál* as a whole shows influence from post-Conversion Christian culture. As regards *Hávamál B*, von See (1975) argues that the words *lqstr* ‘wickedness’ (98,6) and *flærðir* ‘deceits’ (102,6) imply a Christian view of the sinfulness of the relationship that Óðinn wishes he had had with Billinger’s maid. But both words are of Germanic origin (with *lqstr* cf. *lasta* ‘to blame’; de Vries [1977], 135 links *flærðr* to *flá-ræði* ‘falsehood’) and must have existed before their meanings were influenced by Christian patterns of thought. Even before the Christian period, a sexually loose girl would be thought to have brought blame on herself and committed deceit against her family, whether she was married or not, so this reasoning does not look strong.

A similar argument that has been advanced by Sprenger (1985) (see especially 188) in favour of a late date for *Vafþrúðnismál* would also apply to *Hávamál B*. She argues that the location of emotion and perception in the breast or heart is a development of the early thirteenth century. If this were correct, st. 84 of *Hávamál B* could not be more than a couple of generations older than the manuscript that contains it, since it contains the line *brigð í brjóst um lagit* ‘(and) deceit lodged in their breasts’ (84,6). But in fact the words *brjóst* and *hjarta* can be found in emotional senses in skaldic verse attributed to a much earlier date. The earliest instance I can find, which contains both words, is in *Gísla saga* ch. 21 (Gísli, *lausavísa* 10,6,8; *Gísla saga*, ed. Björn K. Þórólfsson and Guðni Jónsson [1943], ÍF 6, 67 and Inngangur XLII; *Skj.* I B, 98; Kock I, 56), which if genuine would date from the time of Gísli’s outlawry in 964. Even if this instance is rejected as spurious (as it probably is), there are several others from the first half of the eleventh century (e.g. Sigvatr Þórðarson, *Erfdrápa Óláfs helga* 7,4 and 24,1: both *hjarta*, *Skj.* I B, 240, 244 and Kock I, 124, 126; Sigvatr Þórðarson, *lausavísa* 24,3: *brjóst*, *Skj.* I B, 252 and Kock I, 130). It seems unlikely that all of these are later fabrications. This does not, of course, provide any argument in favour of an early date for *Hávamál B*; it merely shows that any evidence for a late dating of the poem has to be sought elsewhere.

It has also been suggested that *Hávamál* has been influenced by a variety of literary works in Latin, and this would again suggest a post-Conversion date.

The most complex argument of this kind is that which claims that *Hávamál* shows influence from *Hugsvinnsmál*, the Old Norse free translation of the *Disticha Catonis*, but as I have argued in the previous essay, this now seems unlikely. Only two points of resemblance have been suggested between *Hugsvinnsmál* and *Hávamál B. Hugsvinnsmál* 42:

Fláráðs manns orðum
þótt hann fagrt mæli,
þarptu eigi þeim at trúa.
Glyslig orð
láttu í gegn koma,
gjaltu svá líku líkt.

In a deceitful man's words
though he may speak fair
you do not need to trust.
With specious words
you should reply,
– thus pay him like for like.

has been linked by Hermann Pálsson (1985), 55 to *Hávamál* 91,4–6:

þá vér fegrst mælom
er vér flást hyggiom,
þat tælir horsca hugi.

we (i.e. men) speak most fair
when our thoughts are most false –
that deceives a sensible (woman's)
mind.

but it actually shows a much closer resemblance to the other parallel he draws, with *Hávamál* 45 (see example A 3 in the preceding essay). It seems probable that *Hávamál A* is here presenting a traditional formula which the poets of *Hugsvinnsmál* and *Hávamál B* later used for different non-traditional purposes.

Hugsvinnsmál 69, on not pursuing old grudges, is a fairly close rendering of *Disticha Catonis* II, 15; it renders the last phrase of the Latin, ...*malorum est* 'is (the behaviour) of bad people' as:

þat kveða ódyggs aðal.

– they say that's the nature of a worthless person.

Hermann (1985), 77 suggests that this might recall *Hávamál* 103,9:

þat er ósnotr's aðal.

that is the nature of a fool.

but this is a common poetic formula (cf. e.g. *Lokasenna* 23,8 and 24,6: *oc hugða ec þat args aðal* 'and I thought that the nature of a pervert'), and does not necessarily suggest borrowing, especially since the subject of the stanza in *Hávamál* – inability to speak eloquently – is completely different from that in *Hugsvinnsmál*.

Another point that has raised suspicions of medieval Christian influence is the *hverfandi hvél* ‘whirling wheel’ of st. 84. This appears in one of a number of stanzas (the others all in *Hávamál A*) which Nore Hagman has derived from the Old Testament apocryphal *Book of Jesus Sirach*, also known as *Ecclesiasticus*:⁵

Præcordia fatui quasi rota carri, et quasi axis versatilis cogitatus illius. (*Ecclesiasticus* 33.5)

The heart of a fool is like the wheel of a cart, and his thought like a rolling axle-tree.

But this verse of *Ecclesiasticus* is not about women, and it is far from certain that the ‘turning wheel’ of st. 84,4 is thought of as a cartwheel. It has also been suggested that it refers to a potter’s wheel,⁶ a lathe,⁷ the moon as patroness of female menstruation,⁸ or a combination of the moon with the idea of the wheel of Fortune.⁹ Elsewhere in Old Norse poetry, the word *hvél* is used almost only of the sun, called *fagrahvél* in *Alvíssmál* 16,5 and *sunnu hvél* in Gamli kanóki’s *Harmsól* 36,7;¹⁰ the moon, which is called *hverfanda hvél* in *Alvíssmál* 14,3 and *hvél mána* in the anonymous *Líknarbraut* 7,3;¹¹ or the wheel of Fortune, which is *auðnu hvél* in Sturla Þórðarson’s *Hákonarkviða* 10,8.¹² One reference to the Wolf as *hvélsvelgr* may allude to either the sun or the moon.¹³ The only clear use of *hvél* for a cartwheel is in the compound *hvélvogn* ‘wheeled wagon’ (*Atlakviða* 28,1), though there may be another in the corrupted text of *Sigrdrífumál* 15,5–6; there are no cases in poetry where it refers to a potter’s wheel or a lathe.

The phrase *hverfanda hvél* (or *hjól*) is also used in some prose texts to refer to Fortune’s wheel. For example, in *Flateyjarbók*, *Ólafs saga Tryggvasonar* ch. 67 (*Flateyjarbók*, ed. Sigurður Nordal et al. [1944–45], I, 99), the men of an unnamed Norwegian town surrender it to King Óláfr, reflecting that:

þó at eftir boði náttúrunnar hafi farsælan oss fylgjusöm verit, þá er með engu móti treystanda á hennar hverfanda hvel, því at þat kann oft undan velta, þá er minnst varir.

although Fortune, at the request of Nature, has been supportive to us, her whirling wheel can by no means be trusted, because it can often turn away when least expected.

Both this and the association of Fortune’s wheel with an inconstant mistress were commonplaces of medieval Latin tradition, probably derived ultimately

from Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy* (ed. and trans. Tester [1973], II, prosa 1, 58–60):

Fortunae te regendum dedisti; dominae moribus oportet obtemperes. Tu vero volentis rotæ impetum retinere conaris?

You have given yourself over to the control of Fortune: you ought to adapt yourself to your mistress's rules. Are you really going to try to stop the whirl of her turning wheel?

It is not known when the text of Boethius's great work reached Iceland, though there was a copy of it in the cathedral library at Hólar by 1525 (*Diplomatarium Islandicum*, IX 298, where it immediately follows 'Ovideus de arte ama(n)di', see below). However, its influence on ideas about Fortune was so pervasive throughout the European Middle Ages that it is not necessary to assume that the poet of *Hávamál* had direct knowledge of it (see Courcelle [1967], *passim*). Fortune was frequently compared with the moon, as in the opening of the *Carmina Burana* 1,1–3; ed. Schmeller (1904):

O Fortuna velut luna
statu variabilis

Oh Fortune, like the moon,
variable in state

Some of the lyrics in this collection certainly became known in the Norse world, as we can see from lengthy quotations from two of them in a thirteenth-century runic inscription from Bergen (*NIYR* no. 603, VI 1–9). It seems most likely that the 'whirling wheel' according to which women's hearts were made in *Hávamál* 84 was understood to be the moon (or its cycle). However, anyone who knew anything of the tradition of secular poetry which formed part of a medieval training in Latin rhetoric would almost inevitably have associated this with the fickleness of Fortune. This stanza would therefore have had most resonance from the early twelfth century onwards, though it is not impossible that it could be earlier than that.

The influence of Latin rhetorical learning may also lie behind some other details of this part of *Hávamál B*. In particular, much of stt. 91–93 resembles some of the sentiments about love in Ovid's *Ars Amatoria*, as a series of direct comparisons may illustrate:

91. Bert ec nú mæli,
þvíat ec bæði veit:

Me Venus artificem tenero præfecit
Amori. (*Ars Amatoria* I, 7)

brigðr er karla hugr konom;
þá vér fegrst mælom,
er vér flást hyggiom,
þat tælir horsca hugi.

92. Fagrt skal mæla
oc fé biðða
sá er vill fljóðs ást fá,
líki leyfa
ins ljósa mans –

sá fær, er fríar.

93. Ástar firna
scyli engi maðr
annan aldregi;
opt fá á horscan
er á heimscan né fá
lostfagrir litir.

91. Let me speak openly now,
because I know both (sexes):
men's minds are faithless to women;
our words are most fair
when our thoughts are most false –
that deceives a sensible mind.

92. He must speak fair
and offer cash
who wants to get a lady's love,
praise the body
of the lovely woman –

he who woos will get her.

Saepe viri fallunt: tenerae non saepe
puellae. (*Ars Amatoria* III, 31)
Ludite, si sapitis, solas impune puellas:
Hac minus est una fraude tuenda fides.
(*Ars Amatoria* I, 643–44)

Promittas facito: quid enim promittere
laedit? (*Ars Amatoria* I, 443)

Nec faciem, nec te pigeat laudare capillos
Et teretes digitos exiguumque pedem.
(*Ars Amatoria* I, 621–22)
Penelopen ipsam, persta modo, tem-
pore vinces. (*Ars Amatoria* I, 477)

Illo saepe loco capitur consultus Amori,
Quique aliis cavit, non cavet ipse sibi.
(*Ars Amatoria* I, 83–84)

Venus has placed me in authority as
tutor to youthful Love.
Men often deceive, tender maids not
often.
If you are wise, cheat women only, and
avoid trouble; keep faith save for this
one deceit.

See that you promise: what harm is
there in promises?

Do not get tired of praising her looks or
hair, her shapely fingers and her tiny
foot.
Only persevere – you will overcome
Penelope herself.

93. Blaming for (being in) love
(is something) no man should
ever do to another;
it often catches a wise person
what doesn't catch a fool –
good looks, attracting desire.

In that place the advisor is often
caught by Love, and he who warns
others fails to beware himself.

If we may believe the L-version of *Jóns saga byskups*, which may date from ca. 1320 (see *Biskupa sögur* I, ÍF 15.1, CCXXXIII), the *Ars Amatoria* was already being read in Iceland by the second decade of the twelfth century, when Bishop Jón of Hólar is said to have come upon the young Klængr Þorsteinsson (later himself bishop of Skálholt, 1152–76):

‘... er einn klerkr, er Klængr hét ... las versabók þá, er heitir *Ovidius de arte*. En í þeirri bók talar meistari Ovidius um kvenna ástir ok kennir með hverjum hætti menn skulu þær gilja ok nálgast þeira vilja. Sem inn sæli Jóhannes sá ok undir stóð, hvat hann las, fyrirbauð hann honum at heyra þess háttar bók ok sagði, at mannsins breysklig náttura væri nógu framfús til munuðlífis ok holdligrar ástar, þó at maðr tendraði eigi sinn hug upp með saurugligum ok syndsamligum diktum.’¹⁴

‘... while a cleric called Klængr ... was reading the book in verse called *Ovidius de Arte*. And in that book Master Ovidius talks about the love of women and teaches how men should deceive them and win them round to their desires. When the blessed Johannes saw and understood what he was reading, he forbade him to listen to this kind of book, and said that the fickle nature of mankind was eager enough for a life of lust and carnal love, even if one did not inflame one's mind with corrupt and sinful poems.’

The somewhat earlier S and H versions of the saga say that Klængr was reading *Ovidius Epistolarum*.¹⁵ This probably refers to the *Heroides* rather than the less objectionable *Epistulae ex Ponto*, but even if we assume this, the description of the book given in the saga fits the *Ars Amatoria* much better than the *Heroides*, as the editors of ÍF 15 point out. The *Ars Amatoria* is also mentioned in the thirteenth-century Norse translation of the *lais* of Marie de France (*Strengleikar*), where it is called *Bók ástarvéla* ‘a book of love-trickeries’ (ed. Cook and Tveitane [1979], 20), and by 1525 the cathedral library at Hólar had a copy of it (*Diplomatarium Islandicum* IX, 298). But in fact a wide variety of Ovid's works were probably obtainable in Iceland. By the middle of the thirteenth century this had been extended to some pseudo-Ovidian or Terentian

works, like the comedy *Pamphilus de Amore*, of which a fragmentary Old Norse version also survives (see Hermann Pálsson [1985 for 1984], 13).

According to *Hungrvaka* ch. 9, Klængr was a great scholar *ok it mesta skáld* ‘and an outstanding poet’.¹⁶ His one extant quatrain of skaldic verse (*Skj.* I B, 515; Kock I, 252) uses the mythological giant-name *Geitir*, so he was certainly familiar with native mythological material as well as with the *Ars Amatoria*; there were doubtless others like him. The point here is not so much that individual echoes between *Hávamál B* and the *Ars Amatoria* are particularly close, but rather that there are so many of them in so few stanzas. Both poets regard love as a cynical contest in which the one constant fact is that men and women do their best to deceive each other; and both illustrate this opinion with stories drawn from their respective mythologies.

Stt. 94–95 show some possible echoes of another source about erotic love that was well known to Latin-educated people in the twelfth century, namely Virgil’s *Eclogue X*:

94. Eyvitar firna
er maðr annan scal,
þess er um margan gengr guma;
heimsca ór horscom
gorir hǫlða sono
sá inn mátki munr.

Omnia vincit Amor, et nos cedamus
Amori. (Virgil, *Eclogue X*, 69)

95. Hugi einn þat veit,
er býr hiarta nær,
einn er hann sér um sefa:
öng er sótt verri
hveim snotrom manni,
enn sér öngo at una.

‘ecquis erit modus?’ inquit. ‘Amor non
talía curat: nec lacrimis crudelis
Amor nec gramina ravis nec cytiso
saturantur apes nec fronde capel-
lae.’ (Virgil, *Eclogue X*, 28–30)

94. For nothing should anyone
blame another
that happens to many a man;
fools out of wise men
it makes men’s sons,
that mighty thing, desire.

Love conquers all things, and we too
yield to Love.

95. Only the mind knows
 what dwells near the heart,
 a man is alone in his mind:
 no sickness is worse
 for any sensible person
 than to find content in
 nothing.

‘Will there be no end?’ he says. ‘Love cares nothing for such things. Cruel Love is no more sated with tears than the grass with streams, bees with clover, or goats with the leafy branch.’

There are probably other Latin or Norse sources (possibly proverbial) for the first half of each of these two stanzas, but the second half of each may well recall Virgil’s famous poem. Certainly, the line *Omnia vincit Amor, et nos cedamus Amori* was well enough known to be quoted in Latin in a surviving runic inscription from Bergen (*NIYR* no. 605, VI 11–13; thirteenth century).

The balance of the linguistic evidence suggests that the narrative parts of *Hávamál B* may date from the later tenth century, while the cultural links of the non-narrative stanzas seem to be with the twelfth. The best explanation of these apparently conflicting indications may be that *Hávamál B* in its present form dates from the twelfth century, but that its poet was led by the example of Ovid to illustrate his attitude to the war of the sexes by using fragments of the text of one or two older mythological poems, which told the stories of Billingsr’s maid and of Gunnlōð.

III. *Billings Mær*

It would be a mistake, however, to assume that the poet leaves his two received myths untouched. It is usually assumed that the story of *Billings mær* is not found anywhere else in Old Norse mythology, but it is alternatively possible that it is a familiar myth, but told only in part and with a slant that has prevented it from being recognised (further, see McKinnell [2005] ch. 10). As told in *Hávamál B*, it may be summarised as follows:

There is no worse suffering than to be without contentment (95), as the speaker discovered when he sat in the reeds waiting for his beloved, but never won her (96). He found Billingsr’s maid asleep on a bed (97) but was persuaded by her, for the sake of secrecy, to leave and return in the evening (98 – in this stanza she calls him Óðinn). When he returned, he found the warlike household ready with

burning torches and cudgels (100). Returning towards morning, he found the household asleep, but a bitch tied to the girl's empty bed (101). The girl devised only mockery for the speaker, and he never gained her (102).

In *Völuspá* 13,7 (Hauksbók text only) *Billingr* is the name of a dwarf. The kenning *Billings burar full* 'the cupful of Billingr's son' (= the mead of poetry, Ormr Steinþórsson 4,3, *Skj.* I B, 385 and Kock I, 191) could also allude to a dwarf, but since there are *two* dwarves in the story of the killing of Kvasir, from whose blood the mead of poetry was made,¹⁷ it seems more likely that Billingr is here a giant, the father of Suttungr. *Billings hviða*, perhaps 'a mighty attack' (*Anon [XII] B* 11,4; *Skj.* I B, 594; Kock I, 289) would also make better sense if *Billingr* were a giant.

Mær can mean 'daughter', 'wife', or simply 'woman', but its commonest meaning is 'virgin, unmarried woman'. *LP* gives fifteen other examples where the meaning 'daughter' is unavoidable, of which eight name the father in the same phrase, (e.g. Gerðr is *in góð mær Gymis* in *Skírnismál* 12,5). In one case a daughter is defined by both her parents (*Sigurðarkviða in skamma* 63,5–6) and in one by her mother (Einarr Skúlason, *Øxarflokkur* 5,5–7; *Skj.* I B, 450; Kock I, 221). I can find only one case where it certainly means 'wife' (*Óðs mey*, referring to Freyja in *Völuspá* 25,8), and one where it means 'sexual partner' (*Heðins mær*, referring to Hildir, a pun on *hildir* 'war', in Hallfreðr, *Óláfs erfdrápa* 17,4; *Skj.* I B, 154; Kock I, 83). *LP* gives four other examples of the sense 'wife', but all of these may have the general sense 'woman' (e.g. *Guðrúnarkviða I* 16,8). Both meanings are therefore possible, but 'daughter' is commoner than 'wife', at least in verse. It has sometimes been argued that Billingr must be the woman's husband because the references to her putative affair as *lqstr* 'fault, wickedness' (98,6) and *flærðir* 'deceit, treachery' (102,6) are more appropriate to an adulterous wife than to a seduced girl (see e.g. Sigurður Nordal [1936], 288–95; Evans, ed. [1986], 118–20). But this ignores the enmity between Óðinn and the girl's (probably giant) family: she knows who he is (98,2), and it would be treachery for her to sleep with the enemy of her family whether she were married or not.

Another distinctive feature is the bitch bound on the bed. The word *grey* is rather uncommon in ON verse, and almost always appears in mythological contexts. Wolves may be called *Viðris grey* 'Viðrir's (=Óðinn's) bitches' (*Helgakviða Hundingsbana I* 13,7) or *grey norna* 'bitches of the Norns' (*Hamðismál* 29,4), and bitches are part of a giant's household property in *Skírnismál* 11,6 and *Prymskviða* 6,3. Most famously, Hjalti Skeggjason is said to have been exiled for blasphemy after reciting the couplet:

Vil ek eigi goð geyja:
grey þykki mér Freyja. (*Íslendingabók*
ch. 7; ÍF I, 15)

'I don't want to bark at/abuse the gods:
Freyja seems a bitch to me.'

Freyja is famously associated with lascivious animals (see Turville-Petre [1964], 176), but even heathens who accepted this were apparently outraged by the suggestions of bestial female lust in this couplet. The only non-mythological use of *grey* in verse is the phrase *gamma greystóði* 'to give (sexual) pleasure to the stud of bitches', used by Gunnarr to insult his Hunnish enemies in *Atlakviða* 11,7; again, the connotations are of extreme and disgusting female lust.

However, the most distinctive feature of this story is that it is the only known episode in which Óðinn fails in an attempted seduction. But it does somewhat resemble Saxo's tale of Rinda (*Gesta Danorum* III.iv, ed. Friis-Jensen and trans. Zeeberg [2005], I, 204–13; trans. Fisher and Ellis Davidson [1979–80], I 76–79, II, 56–58), where Othinus is rejected three times before he is ultimately successful. Similarly, Óðinn makes three journeys here (after the attempted assignation among the reeds in st. 96): the first when he finds the girl asleep in her bed and is then persuaded to wait until night before enjoying her; the second when he finds a military force waiting; and the third when he finds a bitch tied to the bed. The female bound on the bed also occurs in the Rinda story, but here it recurs as bestial parody. If Rindr was thought to have been driven mad with frustrated sexual desire by Óðinn's *seiðr* (illicit magic), she could be said to have become a 'bitch' in the same sense as is intended in Hjalti's accusation against Freyja.

The tale of *Billings mær* may be partially derived from the myth of Rindr, but it presents us with a number of apparent illogicalities. We first see the lover waiting in the reeds for his mistress to appear, but we never learn whether she comes or not. In stt. 97–98, Óðinn suddenly and without explanation has unopposed access to her private quarters, where she is asleep although it is the daytime, and where he could apparently have forced her to have sex with him. Then he loses this access, and returning after dark is opposed by armed men with torches. This ought to warn him that his lady has already alerted her family, and therefore that he has been tricked – but he still returns again towards morning to experience the final insult.

The episode of the lover waiting in the reeds (st. 96) has no counterpart in the Rindr myth, but may draw on an early form of the medieval courtly *chanson d'aventure*, in which two characters meet in a wild countryside setting and the man urges the girl to have sex with him, either immediately or later.¹⁸ The version of it in *Hávamál B* is quite closely paralleled in a number of later ballads, which usually allow a girl who has promised to meet her would-be lover

to keep her promise and yet defend her virginity successfully by making him fall asleep at the vital moment. In the Swedish *Sömn-runorna* (SMB 2, vol. 1, p. 19) and the Danish *Søvnerunerne* (ed. Grundtvig et al. [1853–1967], II, 337, no. 81) she uses runes to make him fall asleep, while in the Anglo-Scottish *The Broomfield Hill* (ed. Child [1882–98], I, 390–99, no. 43) an old witch casts a spell for her to make him fall asleep. The last also places the encounter in the open air, among the broom bushes on a hill. In *Hávamál B* we never learn whether Billingsr's maid keeps her tryst or simply stays away, but it is at least possible that she should be assumed to have employed magic in order to humiliate Óðinn by ensuring that he will be asleep when she comes.

The idea of Óðinn's three visits to the home of *Billings mæ*r may come from the myth of Rinda, in which Odin makes four visits to the giant's household, disguised as a general, a smith, a soldier and finally an old woman. If, as seems likely, the soldier disguise is an addition made by Saxo himself (see McKinnell [2005], ch. 10), Óðinn may originally have made three visits to Rindr, adopting a more humiliating disguise with each visit. His repeated rejections by her suggest that she sees through these disguises, just as Billingsr's maid calls him plainly by his real name. Similarly, there are three episodes here. The first presents an image of *Billings mæ*r as the desired but unattained beauty, although the delaying promise, which in the traditional *chanson d'aventure* situation is quite logically made when the girl is away from the protection of her family, is instead attached to the erotic scene of her in bed (*Hávamál* 97–98). The second episode frustrates the lover by physically preventing his access to the sexual pleasure which he could have taken earlier. The third replaces the desired mistress with her bestial counterpart, the bound and sexually available (but aesthetically repulsive) bitch. It is even possible that the twelfth-century Christian poet has created a deliberate contrast between the lover's illusion (the erotic dream of unattained beauty) and the beastly reality that human beings driven by sexual desire are no better than dogs.

Another European story-pattern which might be thought to have influenced the episode of Billingsr's maid can be seen in the collection known as *The Seven Sages of Rome*, which first appears in the late twelfth-century Latin *Historia septem sapientium* by Johannes de Alta Silva (ed. Hilka [1913], 63–68). An emperor's daughter volunteers to sleep for one night with any of her wooers in return for a hundred marks, but protects her virginity by keeping in the bed an enchanted feather which makes them fall asleep. A young nobleman loses his only hundred marks to her, but then borrows another hundred, throws the pillow out of the bed to keep himself awake, and accidentally throws out the feather with it, after which he is able to make love to the princess and subsequently marry her. All the stories in the *Seven Sages of Rome* collection are

thought to be of Arabic origin (ed. Hilka [1913], XII–XIII), and as its framework narrative is set in Palermo they may have become known in Latin-speaking Europe through the mixed Christian/Muslim university which flourished there under the Norman kings of Sicily.

An adapted version of the same story appears in the *Gesta Romanorum*, which was probably compiled in England in the late thirteenth century (*Gesta Romanorum* XL, ed. Herrtage [1879, reprinted 1962], 158–65, 474–76; on the origins of its Latin original see xvii). Here there is only one lover, and the emperor's daughter initially rejects his attempts to woo her with fine words ('*for throwist thou*', *quod she*, '*with thi deseyvable and faire wordes to begile me?*'). The owl's feather is replaced by a written charm, of which the lover learns through the advice of the philosopher Virgil. His two attempts to have sex with the girl become three – the first financed by his own money, the second by pledging his lands, the third by a bond of flesh made with a merchant (which resembles the pact between Antonio and Shylock in Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, except that it is the lover himself who is at risk, not his friend). Most of the changes in the *Gesta Romanorum* version have the effect of bringing the tale closer to those of Rindr and Billings's maid: the lover makes three visits, exposing himself to greater humiliation and danger on each occasion. As in the Rindr story, he finally overcomes the girl's magic and gains her lasting love by wisdom rather than by accident. This may suggest that the Arabic tradition did not in fact influence the Norse stories, but picked up some of their features as it became 'naturalised' in western European tradition. Another basic difference between the Norse and other European traditions is that, whereas the latter always end in reconciliation and a happy marriage, the Scandinavian stories are confrontational and conclude either with the rape and exploitation of the giantess (Rindr) or with the humiliation of the would-be lover (*Billings mæ*r and the ballad tradition).

Once the lover was no longer a master of disguise and magic, it might become difficult to explain how he could gain unopposed access to the girl. Johannes de Alta Silva solves this difficulty by making the emperor die early in the story, but this solution was not available within the tradition of Óðinn's seductions, where the father of the giantess is important as a threatening, suspense-bringing figure. In *Hávamál B* Óðinn's magical powers appear to be at best sporadic: they may enable him to get into the girl's sleeping quarters during the daytime in stt. 97–98, but they do not help him in the reeds, or when he faces physical exclusion or the insult of the tethered bitch. This inconsistency may result from the story having had more than one source.

This story differs from all Óðinn's other seduction expeditions, first in that it appears to fail, and secondly in that he has no ulterior motive for it, but only a

sexual desire for its own sake which is markedly at odds with his usual character. One possible explanation for this is that this poet needed a story about Óðinn's sexual adventures which included an example of female duplicity. Since Óðinn is usually successful in gaining and keeping the love of his giant mistresses, this was hard to find, and the poet therefore used only the first half of a myth in which Óðinn would eventually triumph, told from his point of view but before his final success. This enabled the poet to make use of the paradox (comically infuriating, from the male point of view), that it is precisely the 'good' woman who brings the lover no sexual good:

Morg er góð mæ
 ef gorva kannar,
 hugbrigð við hali.
 (*Hávamál* 102,1–3)

Many a good girl is,
 if one properly tests her
 fickle of mind to a man.

She may be *ráðspaca* and *horsca* 'wise in plans' and 'prudent' (st. 102,5,8), and perhaps Óðinn even reluctantly admires her for this, but he would certainly have preferred her to be among the more foolish virgins who are the usual victims of his seductions.

IV. Gunnlōð

This poem tells the story of Gunnlōð only in part, as we can see from a comparison with the more complex account of the origins of the mead of poetry in Snorri's *Skáldskaparmál* (chs. G57, G58 and 3; ed. Faulkes [1998], I, 3–5, 11; trans. Faulkes [1987], 61–64, 70), and also from the fact that many of the details of Snorri's story are confirmed by tenth- and eleventh-century skaldic kennings for poetry (Einarr Skálaglammr's late-tenth-century *Vellekla* [*Skj.* I B, 117–24; Kock I, 66–69] is particularly rich in them). These vouch for the mead of poetry having been made from the blood of Kvasir, hoarded by dwarves, taken by giants and kept in the vats called Boðn and Són, and plundered by Óðinn, who turns into an eagle in order to bring it to Ásgarðr.

Almost nothing of this is mentioned in *Hávamál B* – only Óðinn's theft of Óðrerir (but not his transformation into an eagle) – and yet the poet clearly knew many details of the traditional story, such as Óðinn's use of the auger Rati to bore through the mountain, and the fact that the giants know their visitor only under the pseudonym *Bölverkr* 'the one who does harm'.

There are also hints that the version of the myth known to this poet was not exactly the same as the one in *Skáldskaparmál*: Gunnlōð places him in a golden

seat (or possibly entertains him while she is sitting in it [105]), which Snorri does not mention; he only gets one drink of the mead, not three (105); Óðrerir seems to be a name for the mead itself, not for a vessel in which it is kept (107); and Óðinn apparently needs Gunnlǫð's help in his escape (108). Perhaps, since *Skáldskaparmál* calls the mountain *Hnithjörg* ('colliding rocks'), it was a mountain which could open and close, like those to be found in many folktales (*Skáldskaparmál* ch. G57, ed. Faulkes [1998], I, 3–4; trans. Faulkes [1987], 62; Simek [1993], 154; and see e.g. *Sir Orfeo* 347–54, ed. Bliss [1954], 31). The belief in various types of beings inside stones seems to have been widespread in pre-Christian times – see McKinnell (2001a). Gunnlǫð may have opened the mountain to let Óðinn out, or carelessly revealed to him how to open the mountain; since Óðinn leaves her in tears, the latter may seem more likely. Her tears also suggest that she remains in love with him when he abandons her. The much-discussed *vel keyptz litar* of st. 107 may indicate that the one-eyed old man has transformed himself into a handsome youth to achieve the seduction. Such magic naturally presents no problems for one who can transform himself at will into a snake or an eagle, and it may have been a traditional feature of his seductions. One of his by-names is *Svipall* 'the changeable' (see e.g. *Grímnismál* 47,1 and *pula IVj* 3,2 [*Skj.* I B, 672; Kock I, 337]; further, see *LP* 554; de Vries [1977], 571; Simek [1993], 306), and at least some of his transformations may have been designed to give himself a sexually attractive appearance.

The omission of a large part of the myth clearly has a literary purpose: this poet knows about the theft of the mead of poetry, but is telling the story for a reason which has nothing to do with that. His focus is on Gunnlǫð's sexual betrayal by Óðinn, not on what leads up to it or the motive for it, and he reshapes the episode to fit the argument of his poem rather than any of the traditional meanings of the myth he is transmitting. Nor is he alone in this, for the Gnostic Poem also alludes to the myth of the theft of the mead (*Hávamál* 12–14), but turns it, grotesquely, into a warning against getting too drunk. The end of *Hávamál B* even reduces those cosmic foes, gods and giants, to the status of neighbouring farmers. The frost-giants turn up to ask their neighbour's advice: has anyone on Óðinn's farm seen that escaping criminal Bǫlverkr? They evidently have their suspicions that Óðinn may be harbouring the miscreant, since he has to take a legal oath about it, and lies shamelessly, which even the cynical Víga-Glúmr does not dare to do except as verbal equivocation (*Víga-Glúms saga* ch. 25, ed. Jónas Kristjánsson [1956], ÍF 9, 85–87). This ending brings us back to the opening theme of male unreliability, and is probably part of the witty 'modernisation' of the myth.¹⁹

V. Conclusion

Hávamál B is a wittily expressed and artfully constructed comment on the sexual deceptions practised by both men and women, which are illustrated by two stories about Óðinn. In its present form, it must date from the twelfth or the early thirteenth century, but much, perhaps most of its narrative content is probably a good deal older.

I have also suggested that the non-narrative sections include many echoes of the sentiments of classical poetry on secular love, especially Ovid's *Ars Amatoria*. The two narrative sections, by contrast, use traditional Norse myths to illustrate a worldly argument about the war of the sexes. This also reflects Ovid's methods, although the poet of *Hávamál B* probably echoes the actual phrases and even whole stanzas of earlier mythological poetry. Although he uses only two mythic episodes and his work is on a tiny scale compared with that of Ovid, it seems quite likely that its composer was directly inspired by the *Ars Amatoria*. Perhaps, after the saintly bishop Jón had gone away, Klængr Þorsteinsson or some other young cleric like him not only continued to read Ovid's 'corrupt and sinful poem', but even tried his hand at producing the same kind of work within the terms of his own culture.

The result certainly seems Ovidian in its witty use of aphorism, its comically rueful acknowledgement of the power of sexual passion, and its perceptive mockery of the sexual strategies of both men and women. It is a thoroughly urbane poem, its outlook a world away from the basic myth-pattern from which its two exempla are derived, and it seems to look forwards towards the high Middle Ages. Nonetheless, it can still draw, apparently effortlessly, on the strength of the old mythological pattern of Óðinn's seduction of giantesses in order to produce an innovative poem of very high quality.

APPENDIX: *HÁVAMÁL B* – A RECONSTRUCTED TEXT

A. The Theme

a) *On Women:*

84. Meyiar orðom
scyli mangi trúa,
né því er qveðr kona;
þvíat á hverfanda hvéli
vóro þeim hiqрто scopuð,
brigð í brióst um lagit.

In the words of a girl
no one should trust,
nor in what a woman says;
for according to a whirling wheel
their hearts were shaped,
inconstancy lodged in their breasts.

b) *On Men:*

91. Bert ec nú mæli,
þvíat ec bæði veit:
brigðr er karla hugr konom;
þá vér fegrst mælom,
er vér flást hyggiom,
þat tælir horsca hugi.

Let me speak openly now,
because I know both (sexes):
men's minds are faithless to
women;
our words are most fair
when our thoughts are most false –
that deceives a sensible mind.

92. Fagrt scal mæla
oc fé bióða
sá er vill flióðs ást fá,
líki leyfa
ins liósa mans –
sá fær, er fríar.

He must speak fair
and offer cash
who wants to get a lady's love,
praise the body
of the lovely woman –
he who woos will get her.

c) *On the Universality and Folly of Love:*

93. Ástar firna
scyli engi maðr
annan aldregi;
opt fá á horscan
er á heimscan né fá
lostfagrir litir.

Blaming for love
no one should do
to another, ever;
it often catches a sensible person
what doesn't catch a fool –
good looks, attracting desire.

94. Eyvitar firna
er maðr annan scal
þess er um margan gengr guma;
heimsca ór horscom
gorir hqlða sono
sá inn mátki munr.

By no means
should one person blame another
for what afflicts many a man;
fools out of wise men
it makes men's sons,
that mighty thing, desire.

B. Woman as Deceiver

a) Gnostic Introduction (1 stanza)

95. Hugr einn þat veit,
er býr hiarta nær,
einn er hann sér um sefa:
qng er sótt verri
hveim snotrom manni,
enn sér qngo at una.

Only the mind knows
what dwells near the heart –
one is alone in one's thoughts:
no sickness is worse
for any sensible person
than to find content in nothing.

b) The Story (6 stanzas)

96. Þat ec þá reynda,
er ec í reyri sat
oc vættac míns munar;
hold oc hiarta
var mér in horsca mæ, r,
þeygi ec hana at heldr hefic.

I proved that
when I sat in the reeds
and waited for my beloved;
flesh and heart to me,
that prudent girl was,
but for all that I have not got her.

97. Billings mey
ec fann beðiom á,
sólhvíta, sofa;
iarls ynði
þótti mér ecci vera,
nema við þat líc at lifa.

Billings's maid
I found on a bed
fair as the sun, sleeping;
the joy of a jarl
seemed nothing to me,
unless he could live with that body.

98. 'Auc nær apni
scaltu, Óðinn, koma,
ef þú vilt þér mæla man;
alt ero óscqþ,
nema einir viti
slícan lqst saman.'

'Once more, near evening,
you must come, Óðinn,
if you want to win a girl by talking;
all is ruined
unless we alone know
such shame, between ourselves.'

99. Aþr ec hvarf,
oc unna þóttomz,
vísom vilia frá;
hitt ec hugða,
at ec hafa mynda
geð hennar alt oc gaman.

100. Svá kom ec næst,
at in nýta var
vígdrót ǫll um vakin;
með brennandom líósom
oc bornom viði,
svá var mér vilstígr of vitaðr.

101. Oc nær morni,
er ec var enn um kominn,
þá var saldrót um sofin;
grey eitt ec þá fann
innar góðo kono
bundit beðiom á.

I turned away –
and I thought myself in love!
– away from certain bliss;
I thought this:
that I would have
all her love and pleasure.

The next time I came
the efficient
war-band was all awake;
with burning lights
and bearing torches:
thus a dangerous journey was
intended for me.

Also near morning,
when I had come back,
when the household had gone to
sleep,
I then found only a bitch
of that good woman
bound on the bed.

c) Coda (1 stanza)

102. Mǫrg er góð mæ,er,
ef gorva kannar,
hugbrigð við hali;
þá ec þat reynda,
er iþ ráðspaca
teygða ec á flærðir fljóð;
háðungar hvernar
leitaði mér it horsca man,
oc hafða ec þess vætki vífs.

Many a good girl,
if one gets to know her thoroughly,
is fickle in mind to a man;
I proved that then,
when that resourceful lady
Enticed towards deceits;
every scorn
the prudent lass sought out for me,
and I did not get that lady at all.

C. Man as Deceiver

a) Gnostic Introduction (1 stanza)

103. Heima glaðr gumi
oc við gesti reifr,
 sviðr scal um sic vera,
minnigr oc málugr,
ef hann vill margfróðr vera,
 opt scal góðs geta;
fimbulfambi
heitir, sá er fát kann segia,
 þat er ósnotr aðal.

A man happy at home,
and cheerful towards a guest,
 must be shrewd about himself,
good at remembering, able to talk,
if he wants to be wise about much,
 must often mention what's good;
an enormous idiot
he's called, who has little to say –
 that is the nature of a fool.

b) The Story (6 stanzas)

104. Inn aldna iqtun ec sótta,
nú em ec aptr um kominn,
 fát gat ec þegiandi þar;
morgom orðom
mæltu ec í minn frama
 í Suttungs sölom.

I visited the ancient giant,
now I have come back,
 I got little there through silence;
many words
I spoke for my own advantage
 in the halls of Suttungr.

105. Gunnlōð mér um gaf
gullnom stóli á
 drycc ins dýra miaðar;
ill iðgiöld
lét ec hana eptir hafa
 síns ins heila hugar,
 síns ins svára sefa.

Gunnlōð gave me
in a golden seat
 a drink of the precious mead;
a poor repayment
I let her have in return
 for that sincere heart of hers,
 for that sorrowful mind of hers.

106. Rata munn
létomc rúms um fá
 oc um griót gnaga;
yfir oc undir
stóðumc iqtu vegir,
 svá hætta ec hofði til.

The auger's mouth
I caused to make room for me
 and to gnaw through the rock;
over and under me
stood haunts of giants;
 thus I risked my head for that.

107. Vel keyptz litar
hefi ec vel notið,
fás er fróðom vant;
þvíat Óðrerir
er nú upp kominn
á alda vés iaðar.

108. Ifi er mér á,
at ec væra enn kominn
iǫtna gǫrðom ór,
ef ec Gunnlaðar né nytac,
innar góðo kono,
þeirar er lǫgðomc arm yfir.

109. Ins hindra dags
gengo hrímþursar,
Háva ráðs at fregna,
Háva hǫllo í;
at Bǫlverki þeir spurðo,
ef hann væri með bǫndom kominn,
eða hefði hánom Suttungr of sóit.

Profitable good looks (?)
I've made good use of
– the shrewd man wants for little–
because Óðrerir
has now arrived
at the edge of the shrine of men.²⁰

I doubt whether
I would have come back yet
out of the courts of giants,
if I had not used Gunnlǫð,
that good woman
whom I laid my arm over.

The next day
the frost-ogres went
to ask the advice of Hávi
in the hall of Hávi;
they asked about Bǫlverkr,
if he had come among the gods,
or had Suttungr slaughtered him?

c) Coda (1 stanza)

110. Baugeið Óðinn
hygg ec at unnit hafi,
hvat scal hans trygðom trúá?
Suttung svikinn
hann lét sumbli frá
oc grœtta Gunnlǫðo.

An oath on the ring
I think Óðinn has sworn
– how can his oaths be trusted?
with Suttungr betrayed
he left that drinking party
and with Gunnlǫð in tears.

NOTES

- 1 Evans (24) suggests that st. 79 might also be part of the poem about *Billings mær*. It is true that it is partly about sexual relations, but not about sexual betrayal, and its opening formula links it to a recurring theme in the Gnostic Poem, that of the foolish man who does not know how to behave (cf. stt. 23–27 and the second half of st. 21).

- 2 Svava Jakobsdóttir (1988, trans. 2002), 38–39 takes *litr* here to refer to the (coloured) drink, but I have not found any other examples of *litr* used in this sense; however, for its use to mean ‘handsome appearance’, see Fritzner (1954), II, 542 (sense 5).
- 3 Von See (1972a), 56 suggests that a similar ‘testing’ is also implied at the beginning of the Gunnlǫð episode, where the aphorism *fimbulfambi heitir; sá er fátt kann segia* ‘he who can’t say much is called a mighty fool’ (st. 103,7–8) is ‘tested’ in the next stanza’s *fátt gat ec þegiandi þar; / mǫrgom orðom mæltu ec í minn frama* ‘I gained little by silence there – I spoke many words to my own advantage’ (st. 104,3–5). However, he thinks that the following story does not altogether fit the advice given in st. 103, which also states that a man at home should be cheerful towards a guest (st. 103,2), whereas Óðinn is the guest, not the host, in the story that follows. But the myth as told in *Skáldskaparmál* ch. G58 reveals Suttungr as a mean and grudging host when he refuses his guest even a drop of his mead (ed. Faulkes [1998], I, 4; trans. Faulkes [1987], 63). This forces his ‘guest’ to acquire the drink by other means, thereby illustrating that Suttungr would have been wiser to follow the advice in st. 103 to entertain his guest well.
- 4 Einar Ólafur Sveinsson (1962), 299 suggests that there are echoes of *Hávamál* in the poetry of Egill Skallagrímsson, including two of *Hávamál B* in *Sonatorrek* 22–23 (see *Egils saga*, ed. Sigurður Nordal [1933], ÍF 2, 255; *Skj.* I B, 37; Kock I, 24). But the resemblances seem slight, and even if a link were accepted it would be impossible to tell which poem was the original and which the borrower.
- 5 Hagman (1957), 13; for an opposing view, see Larrington (1991), 148.
- 6 Meringer (1906), 455; Evans, ed. (1986), 115–16.
- 7 Larrington (1991), 148.
- 8 Kristján Albertsson (1977), 57–58.
- 9 Singer (1944–47), 16–17; Halldór Halldórsson (1958), 7–12; von See (1978), 16–26 and (1981), 73–83.
- 10 *Skj.* I B, 557; Kock I, 270; *SPSMA* VII, 104.
- 11 *Skj.* II B, 162; Kock II, 86; *SPSMA* VII, 237 and note, later thirteenth century.
- 12 *Skj.* II B, 120 and Kock II, 64, later thirteenth century.
- 13 *Anon X (II) B* 6,7, *Skj.* I B, 172 and Kock I, 92.
- 14 *Jóns saga ins helga*, L-version, ch. 24, ed. Guðni Jónsson (1948), II, 39–40.
- 15 Ch. 8 in ed. Sigurgeir Steingrímsson, Ólafur Halldórsson and Peter Foote (2003), ÍF 15:2, 211–12; ch. 13 in ed. Guðni Jónsson (1948), II, 103. For the relative datings of the three versions, see ÍF 15:1, CCXIX–CCXX and CCXXXVII.
- 16 ed. Ásdís Egilsdóttir (2002), 34; ed. Guðni Jónsson (1948), I, 26.
- 17 *Skáldskaparmál* ch. G57, ed. Faulkes (1998), I, 3–4; trans. Faulkes (1987), 62.

- 18 See Peter Dronke (1968), 200–06; one of his major examples is by Walter of Chatillon (ca. 1135– after 1184), whose *Alexandreis* became the source of *Alexanders saga*. This particular example may not have been known in Iceland in the twelfth century, but the genre as a whole surely must have been.
- 19 For an interpretation of the Gunnlōð myth that diverges strongly from mine, see Svava Jakobsdóttir (1988, trans. 2002); she argues that the episode in *Hávamál* tells a tragic myth in which Hávi is a death god equivalent to the Irish Lug, his daughter Gunnlōð is an earth goddess, and Óðinn betrays the oaths of his sacred marriage to her by stealing the cup Óðrerir. This article analyzes the story without reference to its literary context within *Hávamál*, assumes that the myth known to the *Hávamál* poet was different from that told by Snorri at every point where they do not explicitly agree, and prefers to rely on analogies with Irish and Sanskrit myth; I cannot agree with her approach in any of these three respects.
- 20 In this difficult stanza, Svava Jakobsdóttir (2002), 38–41 takes *litar* to refer to the colour of the sacred drink (see above), and retains the MS form *iarðar*, translating the second half-stanza: ‘because Óðrerir (interpreted as a sacred cup) has now come up to (the island) Aldi of the shrine of earth’. While it is always desirable to preserve manuscript readings where possible, this makes poor sense, and *iarðar* would be a very understandable *lectio facilior* error for the less common word *iaðar*; I therefore accept the emendation suggested by most modern editors.

5 Wisdom from Dead Relatives: The *Ljóðatal* Section of *Hávamál*¹

This essay will investigate the origins and import of *Hávamál D*, or *Ljóðatal*, and the mythic pattern on which it is based. Its first four stanzas (stt. 138–41) recall Óðinn’s sacrifice of himself to himself, while the remainder (stt. 146–61, 162,1–3 and 163) detail the nine magical spells that he learned in the world of the dead, together with another nine that he was then empowered to compose for himself. The ‘I’ here is unequivocally Óðinn, and the first-person pronoun appears in every stanza of the poem, as if to emphasise his complete ownership of the eighteen spells. The ‘narratee’ is almost absent: the second-person pronoun appears only once, referring to the applicability of the first, generalised spell, and it appears to be addressed to any listener:

hiálp heitir eitt,
enn þat þér hiálpa mun
við sǫcom oc sorgom
oc sútom gorvǫllom.

one is called ‘Help’,
and it will help you
against lawsuits and sorrows
and all troubles without exception.

(*Hávamál* 146,4–7)

Otherwise, the focus is entirely on the use that Óðinn himself can make of the spells.

Ljóðatal is generally quite regular metrically; nearly all its variations from regular *ljóðaháttir* fall within the limits of what can be regarded as deliberate ornament, the only exception being st. 156, where the second half of the stanza is in variant *galdratalag*, but with an extra line. Otherwise, all the poem’s metrical variations look artful: it begins and ends with nine-line stanzas (stt. 138, 163), and the second and second-last spells are in shortened, three-line stanzas (stt. 147, 162,1–3). The second halves of stt. 141, 146 are in *galdratalag* – appropriately, since the subject matter of st. 141 is Óðinn’s composition of the

second nine magic songs, while st. 146 describes the first of the eighteen spells. Variant *galdralag* in the second half of st. 149 is used to mark a particularly ancient charm, against fetters, which is echoed in the Old High German *First Merseburg Charm*;² the second halves of stt. 155–57 all use variant *galdralag*, and these probably mark the first three charms that Óðinn was thought to have composed for himself.

The incidence of the expletive particle³ suggests a slightly earlier than average date for *Ljóðatal*:

Figure 5.1

Poem	Lines	Average incidence	Actual incidence	Deviation	Deviation per 100 lines
<i>Háv. D</i>	139	3.7	4	+0.3	+0.21

This certainly does not prove that this is a pre-Christian poem, but the traditional conundrum facing students who study the poem remains: if it is a pre-Christian text, how extensive is the Christian influence on it and how is that influence to be explained? If not, how was it possible for a Christian poet to compose a poem that echoes the Crucifixion of Christ so clearly without being accused of blasphemy? In any case, it seems surprising that the Christian scribe of the Codex Regius should have included a poem that relates a myth which Snorri studiously avoids telling in *Snorra Edda*. But it must be admitted that we do not really know how far ‘heathen’ poetry was religiously acceptable in any given circle of literate but secular Old Norse society, or why it might have been considered permissible to copy a poem like *Ljóðatal* but not to compose it.

I. Christian Influence on the Opening of *Ljóðatal*

The two stanzas which have attracted most scholarly attention are stt. 138–39:

Veit ek, at ek hekk
vindga meiði á
nætr allar nú,
geiri undaðr
ok gefinn Óðni,
sjálfr sjálfum mér,
á þeim meiði
er manngi veit
hvers hann af rótum renn.

I know that I hung
on a windswept tree
throughout nine nights,
wounded with a spear
and given to Óðinn,
myself to myself,
on that tree
of which no one knows
from what roots it runs.

Við hleifi mik sældu
né við hornigi,
nýsta ek niðr.
Nam ek upp rúnar,
cepandi nam,
fell ek apr þaðan.

They did not comfort me with a loaf,
nor with any drinking horn.
I peered downwards.
I picked up the runes/secrets,
shrieking I took them.
I fell back from there.

Von See, following Reichardt, suggests that st. 138 shows ‘a contamination of a heathen initiation ritual with the death of Christ on the Cross’.⁴ This may be true, but it does not follow that the poet was composing from a Christian viewpoint, as Reichardt and von See suggest. Unlike Christianity, heathenism had no tests of orthodoxy, and it could easily borrow from Christianity at any point. Heathen Scandinavians had contacts with their Christian neighbours for at least two centuries before the Conversion, and it would be surprising if the ideas and images of Christianity failed to make any impact during that time. The demonstration of some Christian influence on the poem would not show that the poet was a Christian or that he was composing after the Conversion to Christianity.

It would, however, be even more surprising for a Christian poet to make up a quasi-Crucifixion scene featuring Óðinn without condemning him; this would surely have amounted to blasphemy in the eyes of most medieval Christians. Snorri conspicuously omits this myth from *Snorra Edda*, although he certainly knew it. In *Skáldskaparmál* chs. 3, 4 (ed. Faulkes [1998], I, 13, 14; trans. Faulkes [1987], 71, 72) he twice quotes Eyvindr skáldaspillir’s (later tenth-century) use of the Óðinn-kenning *gálga farmr* ‘cargo of the gallows’, understanding it correctly but, perhaps significantly, not explaining it.⁵

There are striking resemblances between the myth of Óðinn’s self-sacrifice and the crucifixion story: both involve the voluntary death of the god by a common mode of execution, followed by his triumphant return. It would be easy for a heathen who did not fully understand the doctrine of the Trinity to interpret Christ’s sacrifice as being the god ‘himself given to himself’. Both Christ and Óðinn are wounded with a spear (compare John 19.34), and the cross is a ‘tree’ with no roots, just as the tree on which Óðinn hangs has unknown roots.⁶ Just as Christ thirsted on the cross (John 19.28), Óðinn is comforted with neither loaf nor horn, and as Christ cried out at the moment of death (see e.g. Mark 15.37), Óðinn shrieks as he picks up the runes (or ‘secrets’, see below) before falling back (st. 139,4–6).

But although the story of the sacrifice of Óðinn on Yggdrasill probably has been influenced by Christianity (at least in the form in which we find it here), there is also compelling evidence that it was a genuine heathen myth, at least in the later tenth century. This remains even if we regard Óðinn-names such as

Hangi, *Hangaguð* and *Hangatýr*⁷ as referring only to the arguably separate fact that men were sacrificed to Óðinn by ritual hanging. Besides Eyvindr skáldaspillir's Óðinn-kenning *gálga farmr* 'gallows-cargo', the myth of Óðinn's sacrifice is needed to explain the name of the World-Tree *Yggdrasill* 'Yggr's (=Óðinn's) steed', which appears five times in *Grímnismál* (stt. 29,6; 30,9; 34,2; 35,1; 44,1) and twice in *Völuspá* (19,2; 47,1), and other Óðinn names such as *Váfuðr* 'Dangler' and probably *Geiguðr* '?the one made to sway', which survive only in the (probably twelfth-century) *Pulur* but could not have come into being without the pre-existing myth.⁸ Óðinn's sacrifice may also be depicted on Lärbro Stora Hammars stone I, Gotland, Sweden, which is usually dated to the eighth century.⁹ This shows a hanged figure suspended from a tree, with two birds (Óðinn's ravens?) above him and three interlocked triangles, a common Óðinn symbol, next to him. This could alternatively represent the ritual sacrifice of a man to Óðinn, but in any case the myth of Óðinn's self-hanging as a sacrifice to himself and the ritual practice of sacrificing men to Óðinn by hanging are probably related. It seems impossible to say which of them preceded the other.

Both Christ and Óðinn are stabbed with a spear as well as hanged. But the spear was already Óðinn's characteristic weapon when Bragi called him *Gungnis váfaðr* 'brandisher of Gungnir', in a verse attributed to the mid ninth century;¹⁰ Egill refers to him as *geirs dróttinn* 'lord of the spear' in *Sonatorrek* 22,2 (ca. 960 – *Skj.* I B, 37; Kock I, 24), and other examples are legion.¹¹ The prominent spear carried by the mounted figure who dominates the Gotlandic picture stone Klinte Hunninge 1¹² may also be an Óðinn-label. According to *Ynglinga saga* ch. 9 (ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson [1941], ÍF 26, 22), the dying Óðinn had himself 'marked' with a spear and appropriated to himself all who die from weapons, just as he is also the god of the hanged. The idea of sacrifice by a simultaneous combination of hanging and stabbing with a spear is also found in the ritual sacrifice to Óðinn of King Víkarr in *Gautreks saga* ch. 7.¹³ A modified form of it (with simultaneous strangulation and stabbing with a dagger) may appear in ibn Fadlan's eyewitness account of the killing of a dead king's concubine during his funeral ceremonies, probably at Bulgarsk on the middle Volga, Russia in 922.¹⁴ In both these cases, the two agencies of death are simultaneous, as they apparently are in *Hávamál*; if this represents what was actually done at ritual sacrifices, the point may have been, as with modern executions by firing squad, to make it impossible to identify the actual killer and thus frustrate any attempt at revenge on the part of the victim's relatives. In the canonical crucifixion account in St. John's Gospel, by contrast, Christ is pierced with the spear after the soldiers have seen that he is already dead (John 19.33–34), so the soldier with the spear definitely does not kill him.

But this difference is less clear-cut than it might seem, for there is a non-canonical variant version of Matthew 27.49 (known as Matthew 27.49b) in which the soldier stabs Christ in the side immediately after he cries out ‘My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?’ and before the final cry with which he gives up the ghost. This reading, which produces a sequence more like the one in *Hávamál*, appears, among other places, in a number of Irish gospel manuscripts; it is quite possible that a tenth-century Norse poet might have encountered it in the mixed Hiberno-Norse culture of Dublin, Man or the Western Isles.¹⁵

But there are two details of the myth related in *Hávamál* 138–39 that cannot be explained as derived solely from Christianity. The nine nights of hanging on the tree are quite different from the more realistic account in the gospels that Christ’s agony lasted for about three hours. Besides, hanging was an ancient form of ritual execution in the Germanic world. Even if we only had Adam of Bremen’s eleventh-century account of the sacrifices by hanging at Uppsala, which Adam claims to have derived from an eyewitness, it would be hard to regard this as imitation of the crucifixion, since it is the fate of dogs and horses as well as human beings.¹⁶ In fact, human sacrifice to Mercurius (i.e. to a god probably equivalent to Wodan/Óðinn) is described in Tacitus, *Germania* ch. 9, completed in 98 AD.¹⁷ The Tollund man, whose preserved body was found in central Jutland, Denmark, and who probably lived about the time of Christ, appears to have been the victim of such a ritual hanging. As there is no evidence that he was bound or assaulted in any way, he may even have acquiesced in his own death.¹⁸ The Borre man from northern Jutland, from about the same date, was also hanged or strangled with a rope that was found with him, but as his body suffered considerable violence before or just after death, he may have been executed as a criminal.¹⁹

The other element in *Hávamál* 138–39 that cannot be derived from Christianity is Óðinn’s supposed picking up of the runes. It is perhaps possible that this detail might have been linked to the myth of the self-sacrifice of the god by heathens who had seen pictures of the crucifixion, either of the type in which the Greek letters Alpha and Omega are placed above the figure of Christ on either side of the cross,²⁰ or with the inscription placed over his head on Pilate’s orders which is referred to in the Gospels (see e.g. John 19.19). As the latter type is common in ivories and other precious Christian objects of the ninth and tenth centuries,²¹ objects which were likely to be plundered in Viking raids, it may be the more probable of the two.

But if this were so, such inscriptions must have been interpreted in a way that owes nothing to Christianity. The *INRI* inscription over Christ’s head stands for *Iesus Nazarenus Rex Iudeorum* ‘Jesus of Nazareth, King of the

Jews', while the Alpha-Omega inscription refers to the fact that Christ is God, the Beginning and the End. But the usual purpose of picking up runes (if that is what they are in *Hávamál* 139) seems to have been practical divination of the future. The earliest surviving description of such a process is in Tacitus, *Germania* ch. 10:

Virgam frugiferae arbori decisam in surculos amputant eosque notis quibusdam discretos super candidam vestem temere ac fortuito spargunt. Mox, si publice consultetur, sacerdos civitatis, sin privatim, ipse pater familiae, precatus deos caelumque suspiciens ter singulos tollit, sublatos secundum impressam ante notam interpretatur.

Cutting a branch from a fruit tree, they chop it into slips and, after marking these out with certain signs, cast them completely at random over a white cloth. Then a civic priest, if the consultation is official, or the head of the family, if private, prays to the gods and, gazing up at the heavens, draws three separate slips: these he interprets by the previously inscribed mark.²²

Something like this may also be implied in *Völuspá* 63, where Hœnir will *hlaut-við kjósa* 'choose the wood of augury' in the re-born world after Ragnarøk, ²³ and in *Ynglinga saga* ch. 38 (ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson [1941], ÍF 26, 70), where King Granmárr of Södermanland goes to Uppsala:

at blóta, sem siðvenja var til móti sumri, at friðr væri. Fell honum þá svá spánn sem hann myndi eigi lengi lifa.

to make sacrifice so that there should be peace, as the custom was at the beginning of summer. Then the augury chip fell for him in such a way as to suggest that he would not live long.

Sure enough, Granmárr is burned alive in his hall the following autumn. The last of these examples may suggest that such divination was sometimes associated with death, and other sources confirm the idea that wisdom about the future can be gained from the dead – which would supply a parallel to the desire for occult knowledge which apparently motivates Óðinn to sacrifice himself in *Hávamál*. In *Baldrs draumar*, when Óðinn wishes to discover the prophetic meaning of Baldr's dreams, he calls up a prophetess who states explicitly that she has been dead for a long time (*Baldrs draumar* 5,8). In *Vafþrúðnismál*, when Óðinn asks the giant the source of his great knowledge, Vafþrúðnir replies:

‘Frá iǫtna rúnom
 oc allra goða
 ec kann segja satt,
 þvíat hvern hefi ec heim um komit;
 nío kom ec heima
 fyr Niflhel neðan,
 hinig deyaia ór helio halir.’

(*Vafþrúðnismál* 43)

‘About the secrets of giants
 and of all gods
 I know how to tell the truth,
 because I have visited every world;
 I have visited nine worlds
 below Niflhel,
 – men die into them from Hel.’

In this case, *rúnar* is usually taken to mean ‘secrets’, and it would be possible either to assume the same sense in *Hávamál* 139 or to regard *nam ec upp rúnar* ‘I took up runes’ as a figurative way of saying ‘I learned secrets’. If they are the secrets of the dead, Óðinn must be assumed to have died in order to get them, and this would supply the necessary motive for his self-sacrifice. But this motivation has nothing in common with Christ’s death for the redemption of mankind, even if that was sometimes closely associated with the Harrowing of Hell, in which the virtuous or repentant dead were redeemed.

In view of Óðinn’s association with the wisdom of the dead, it seems surprising that some scholars who accept that the myth of Óðinn’s sacrifice is not of wholly Christian origin have denied that he dies at all in *Hávamál*. Among these are Sijmons and Gering (SG III.i, 146), who suggest that the fact that he is said in st. 141 to flourish and grow after his sacrifice means that he does not die. This view may be the result of a desire for consistency, since it is a central feature of Old Norse mythology that Óðinn *will* die in the future at Ragnarök and will not then be able to return to life. However, Old Norse heathenism can no longer be seen as a unified mythological system in which the details of different myths must be consistent with each other. Rather, each myth has its own internal logic and consistency, and in the myth of Óðinn’s sacrifice it seems that he is able to visit the world of the dead and return from it. The same view may also be implied by *Vafþrúðnismál* 42–43, where Óðinn asks the giant where he gets his knowledge from and *Vafþrúðnir* replies that he has been in the nine worlds of the dead below Niflhel. In this sort of wisdom contest, one can only ask questions to which one knows the traditional mythological answers – that is how *Vafþrúðnir* finally realises Óðinn’s identity, when he asks a question to which only Óðinn can possibly know the answer (*Vafþrúðnismál* 54–55).²⁴ It follows that so far as the *Vafþrúðnismál* poet is concerned, Óðinn too must possess the wisdom of the dead.

Jere Fleck, Margaret Clunies Ross and Henning Kure²⁵ have argued that Óðinn’s suffering on Yggdrasill is an initiation ritual like those that introduce young men to adult male status in many traditional societies. The initiand must

undergo various privations and tortures to obtain occult knowledge ‘(and here the price is physical suffering just short of death)’.²⁶ But leaving aside the question of whether this really is an initiation ritual, there is a clear difference between myth and its ritual imitation. For example, when St. Paul uses the death and resurrection of Christ to urge the Romans:

Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin (Romans 6.11)

he is not suggesting that they should actually kill themselves in imitation of Christ, and yet that does not alter the reality of Christ’s death on the cross. Even if *Ljóðatal* does present a mythic version of an initiation, therefore, Óðinn may still have been seen as dying and being resurrected, and one is bound to ask in what sense he is really given as a sacrifice to himself if he does not die.

More recently, Ottar Grønvik²⁷ has argued that the speaker in stt. 111–64 of *Hávamál* is not Óðinn at all, but a human priest of Óðinn, who in stt. 138–39 does not die, but undergoes an initiation ordeal with the aim of achieving mystic union with the god. He further suggests that a man might have at least a chance of surviving such an ordeal by resting or bracing his feet against a branch. Magne Myhren²⁸ has followed this up by suggesting that the verb *hanga* in st. 138 could mean something like the modern English ‘hang onto’ rather than referring to a means of execution.²⁹

Grønvik’s line of argument does deal with the problem that st. 138 seems to be unequivocally spoken by Óðinn and st. 143 by someone else, but a number of serious objections can be made to it nonetheless:

1. So far as I know, there is no evidence from the late heathen period for the existence of professional priests of Óðinn other than *goðar*, who practised their religious authority alongside a secular one derived from their family’s ownership of the *goðorð*. It seems highly unlikely that aristocratic Norse families would allow their leading members to undergo an ordeal which usually resulted in death. Even if some men might survive nine days and nights without food or drink hanging in (or onto) a tree, an unacceptably large proportion would die, and having been previously wounded with a spear would probably make survival unlikely. This suggests that the idea of an extreme initiation ordeal can only have existed (if it did exist) as a poetic fiction, not as a social fact.
2. The pursuit of mystic union seems, at least in the West, to be a fairly recent idea, and to derive from the experience of mystics within religious traditions which involve meditation on canonical scriptures, notably Judaism, Christianity and Islam. There is no evidence for a tradition of heathen

Germanic mysticism, or for the canonical scriptures needed for such meditation, and in any case this kind of religious mysticism can hardly be found even in western Christian tradition before the fourteenth century.

3. Other accounts of Óðinn ‘giving’ suggest that the victim is hanged by the neck and actually dies, as in the sacrifice of King Víkarr in *Gautreks saga* ch. 7, which the king expects to be a purely symbolic ritual:

Stofninn fell undan fótum honum, en kálfsþarmarnir urðu at viðju sterkri, en kvistrinn reis upp ok hóf upp konunginn við limar, ok dó hann þar.

The tree-stump fell away from under his feet, while the calf’s entrails became a strong halter, but the branch sprang up and lifted the king up among the branches, and he died there.³⁰

A similar figure appears on Lärbro Stora Hammars Stone 1 (Gotland, Sweden, probably eighth century, see above).³¹ Whether this represents Óðinn himself or a man sacrificed to him, it shows a man being hanged by the neck from a rope attached to a tree, and this would naturally result in death, as it does in Víkarr’s case.

4. It is hard to see in what sense Óðinn can really be ‘given as a sacrifice to himself’ by means of a non-fatal ordeal undergone by someone else. The whole point of human sacrifice is that the victim of it must die. Indeed, much of the narrative force of the episode in *Gautreks saga* depends on the fact that, like Starkaðr (the perpetrator) but unlike Víkarr (the victim), we already know that Óðinn will not be satisfied with a purely symbolic sacrifice, but has demanded an actual death. Sacrificial hanging of both men and animals is confirmed by Adam of Bremen, who claims to be following the account of an elderly eye-witness to the sacrifices at Uppsala in the mid-eleventh century, and leaves no doubt that the victims died and that the bodies of men and animals were left hanging in the wood.³²

It seems clear that the actual sacrifice of a human being always involved his death, and there is no reason to think that Óðinn’s mythical sacrifice is any different.

II. The Underlying Myth

Most of the scholars who have considered this myth have concentrated mainly on the content of stt. 138–39, but it is the next two stanzas that reveal its underlying shape:

Fimbulliód nío
 nam ec af inom frægja syni
 Bǫlþors, Bestlo fǫður,
 oc ec drycc of gat
 ins dýra miððar,
 ausinn Óðreri.

Þá nam ec frœvaz
 oc fróðr vera
 oc vaxa oc vel hafaz;
 orð mér af orði
 orðz leitaði,
 verc mér af verki
 vercs leitaði. (*Hávamál* 140–41)

Nine monstrous magic songs
 I learned from the famous son
 of Bǫlþorr, Bestla's father,
 and I gained a drink
 of the precious mead
 sprinkled from Óðreri.

Then I began to become fruitful
 and to be wise
 and to grow and flourish;
 one word after another
 found out (the next) word for me,³³
 one deed after another
 found out (the next) deed for me.

If my preceding analysis of stt. 138–39 is right, these events should be assumed to take place in the world of the dead. The word *fimbulliód* probably served to emphasise the fact that Óðinn derives these magic songs from the giants. Óðinn is called *fimbultýr* 'monstrous/magic god' (*Vǫluspá* 60,7) and *fimbulþulr* 'monstrous / magical wise man' (*Hávamál* 80,5, 142,5), both in connection with his runes or secrets; but the *fimbulvetr* 'monstrous winter' will be the one that precedes the coming of the giants at Ragnarøk (*Vafþrúðnismál* 44,6). The only other poetic compound that uses the element *fimbul-* is *fimbulfambi* 'a monstrous fool' (*Hávamál* 103,7), and this can be connected with the related form *fífl* or *fífl* 'fool', and in particular with its use in the phrase *fífls megir* 'giant's sons' (*Vǫluspá* 51,5). 'Giant' or 'monster' seems to have been the original meaning of this word (AEW 119), cf. OE *fifelcynnes eard* 'the land of the race of giants' (*Beowulf* 104),³⁴ *purh fifela gewæld* 'through the realm of giants/monsters' (*Waldere* II, 10).³⁵ In Old English it is often associated with sea monsters, and the words *fifelstream* and *fifelwæg* (both meaning 'ocean') also appear in OE verse.³⁶ The nine *fimbulliód* therefore seem to be mighty magic songs which are now characteristic of Óðinn, but which he derived from the giants.

The 'famous son of Bǫlþorr' is therefore probably a giant. He is in fact so obscure that nothing else is known about him,³⁷ but Bestla is certainly Óðinn's mother. Einarr skálaglamm's *Vellekla* (ca. 986) refers to him as *son Bestlu*, and Steinarr Sjóðason (also later tenth century) as *Bestlu niðr*.³⁸ The name *Bestla* also appears in a list of names of women in *Pula IV* yy 1,5, where the surrounding names are almost all those of goddesses (see *Skj.* I B, 677; Kock I, 342), but this is probably derived from *Hávamál*. In *Gylfaginning* ch. 6 Snorri says that Búri, the primeval male figure who was licked out of the frost-stones by the

cow Auðhumla, begot a son called Borr, who married Bestla, the daughter of Bǫlþorn; their three sons were Óðinn, Vili and Vé.³⁹

The name Bestla must be genuinely pre-Christian, though its original meaning is uncertain.⁴⁰ It has been derived from a supposed PGmc. strong feminine noun **bastilón* ‘bark-giver’, related to ON *bastr* ‘the inner bark of a tree’ and *bestisíma* ‘a rope made of bark fibre’.⁴¹ This might point to an origin myth in which gods, like men, evolved or were created from trees; the name *Heimdallr*, which may literally mean ‘world tree’, may also suggest this.⁴² Because trees grow out of the ground, this might suggest a chthonic origin for Bestla, and explain why she was regarded as a giantess. But elaborations of this interpretation which connect her specifically to the yew tree (Schröder [1941]) or to one of the norns (here thought of as a crude giantess who spins rope rather than thread, Sturtevant [1952]) seem to me to be based only on the imaginations of the critics concerned.⁴³

A more likely possibility is that the name derives from PGmc. *banstilón*, cf. Old Frisian *bóst* ‘marriage’, *bóstigia* ‘to marry’, or as a feminine noun ‘spouse’. In that case, the name would simply refer to her role as the wife of Óðinn’s father. This would imply that the name *Bestla* ‘wife’ probably originates from the same myth as *Búri* ‘progenitor’ and *Burr* ‘son’. All three names would then represent an account that preserved the mystery of the origins of the chief god by means of a refusal to give meaningful answers. The answer to the question ‘Who was Óðinn’s father?’ is then *Burr Búrason* ‘the son of his progenitor’, and to the question ‘Who was Óðinn’s mother’ the answer was ‘(his father’s) wife’.

If this is correct, the name of Bestla’s father may be a separate and more recent development. The Codex Regius text of *Hávamál* calls Bestla’s father *Bǫlþórr* ‘evil Þórr’, while all manuscripts of *Snorra Edda* (which probably derives the name from *Hávamál*) call him *Bǫlþorn* ‘evil thorn’. Either would be a giant-name. The rune-name *þurs* ‘ogre’ was sometimes called *þorn* (the author of the *First Grammatical Treatise* calls it *Staf þann, er flestir menn kalla þorn* ‘the letter which most people call *þorn*’),⁴⁴ and *Þorn* also appears twice in Eilífr’s *Pórsdrápa* as the name of a giant or a *heiti* meaning ‘giant’.⁴⁵ On the other hand, the element *Þórr* does occasionally appear in giant-kennings (e.g. *berg-Þórr* ‘rock-Þórr’, in a couplet by the eleventh-century skaldic poet Skraut-Oddr; and possibly *Þórr sárriðu, þursa dróttinn* ‘Þórr of gangrene, lord of ogres’, in a late-eleventh-century runic charm from Sigtuna, Sweden, though this is sometimes interpreted as *Purs sárriðu ...*).⁴⁶ Whatever the correct form of the name, *Hávamál* is the only poetic source for it, and it is possible that the poet of *Ljóðatal* made it up as a suitable giant-name to alliterate with *Bestla*.

Why Bǫlþorn’s son remains anonymous is a mystery, unless he too is an invention of this poet. Sijmons and Gering (SG III.i, 151) suggest that he is

Mímir, from whose well or spring of wisdom Óðinn is said to have gained a drink by pledging his eye.⁴⁷ Mímir would certainly be a suitable informant for Óðinn, but no other source tells us that they are related; it has been doubted whether Mímir was actually a giant at all;⁴⁸ and so far as we know, Óðrerir (usually the mead of poetic inspiration or the vat in which it was contained) has nothing to do with Mímir or his well. Their further suggestion that Óðrerir was the brewing kettle in which the mead of poetry was made from the outflow of Mímir's well or spring flies in the face of *Skáldskaparmál*, which says that the mead was made from the blood of Kvasir.⁴⁹ The name Óðrerir is probably equivalent to Óð-hrerir 'what stirs up the mind' or 'what stirs the mind to ecstasy',⁵⁰ and this would apply better to the mead of poetry itself than to its container. It probably refers to the mead in *Hávamál* 107, while Einarr skálaglamm's kenning Óðreris alda 'Óðrerir's wave' (*Vellekla* 5,3, late tenth century, *Skj.* I B, 117; Kock I, 66) could be understood in either sense. Snorri takes it to refer to the container in which the mead is stored, but he probably derives this interpretation from *Hávamál* 140, so this is of little help to us here.⁵¹

A simpler solution might be to take the second half of *Hávamál* 140 figuratively, to mean: 'and I was inspired to express myself in verse'. This also involves a problem, for the mead of poetry usually refers, not to the ability to recite verse which already exists (as the nine *fimbulljóð* would have to do to be called 'songs' at all), but to the inspiration which produces extempore poetic composition. However, this objection is answered in the second half of st. 141:

orð mér af orði	one word after another
orðz leitaði,	found out (the next) word for me,
verc mér af verki	one deed after another
vercs leitaði. (<i>Hávamál</i> 141,4–7)	found out (the next) deed for me.

This explains why eighteen magic songs are specified in the following stanzas rather than nine: each of the nine *fimbulljóð* leads on to another, new one. The first nine are of giant origin, while the second nine are Óðinn's own discoveries and poetic compositions; we should therefore expect to find some differences between the two halves of his list of eighteen magic songs.

Whichever explanation of Óðrerir is adopted, the implication is that this poet was capable of adapting his received material, and that part of his strategy was to magnify Óðinn's achievement. He obviously regards Óðinn's sacrifice of himself on Yggdrasill as an act of heroic courage by which he gained nine magic songs from an ancient giant in the world of the dead. However, he also implies that Óðinn had the wisdom necessary to compose nine equally powerful songs himself and the power to translate them into deeds (*verk af verki*, the practical effects that resulted from the magic spells).

The relationship between a man and his sister's son was traditionally a sacred one,⁵² but this does not explain why the poet should have used a nameless uncle as Óðinn's teacher. Margaret Clunies Ross has suggested that this myth can be connected with male initiation rituals, but that the god, typically from the point of view of his giant relatives, fails to make the proper recompense for the privileged knowledge to which he has been allowed access. It is true that in its present form, the myth does look as if Óðinn gains access to the wisdom of the dead as a result of a ritual of suffering, but this may be due to influence from the Christian crucifixion story. The supernatural gifts provided by his nameless uncle (magic spells and the mead of poetry) are, however, of a kind usually associated with female donors.⁵³

The myth-pattern of *Ljóðatal* seems to be related to that found in a number of other eddic poems, notably *Svipdagsmál*,⁵⁴ *Sigrdrífumál*⁵⁵ and in various modified forms in *Hervararkviða*,⁵⁶ *Völuspá* and *Baldrs draumar*.⁵⁷ Its basic form can be described as follows:

1. **The protagonist has gone to a grave-mound** (*Svipdagsmál* 1,4–6, *Hervararkviða* 19–22, *Baldrs draumar* 4,1–4; to the hill where Sigrdrífa is sleeping, *Sigrdrífumál* opening prose).
2. **There he/she calls on the dead person to rise** (*Svipdagsmál* 1,1–3, *Hervararkviða* 23–26, *Baldrs draumar* 4,5–8), **using some form of persuasion or compulsion** (*Svipdagsmál* 1,4–6, *Hervararkviða* 26, *Baldrs draumar* 4,5–8).
3. **If the dead person is a parent she/he acknowledges the protagonist and asks why she/he has been woken** (*Svipdagsmál* 2; *Hervararkviða* 27,1–2). **If not, she asks who has woken her** (*Baldrs draumar* 5, *Sigrdrífumál* 1,1–4), **and the protagonist names himself**, honestly (*Sigrdrífumál* 1,5–8) or deceitfully (*Baldrs draumar* 6,1–2).
4. **The protagonist asks for protective spells** (*Svipdagsmál* 5) **or the answers to some mythological questions** (*Baldrs draumar* 6,3–8). In *Hervararkviða* 23,5–8 this is replaced by a magical sword, and in *Ungen Sveidal* by a magical horse and sword.
5. **The dead person gives the protagonist a sacred number of pieces of effective magic or occult wisdom**: nine protective spells (*Svipdagsmál* 6–14); nine magic songs, from which he learns another nine (*Ljóðatal*); seven types of magic runes (*Sigrdrífumál* 6–13); the answers to three mythological questions (*Baldrs draumar* 7–11).
6. **The dead person invokes a final blessing on the protagonist** (*Svipdagsmál* 16,4–6, *Hervararkviða* 42, *Sigrdrífumál* 20–21, *Baldrs draumar* 14,1–2, where the blessing survives despite fierce hostility between the two characters in the rest of the text).

This traditional myth-pattern may also help to explain the mysterious drink that Óðinn obtains along with the nine monstrous magic songs in st. 140, for the same connection is found in *Sigrdrífumál* 5, where Sigrdrífa tells the young Sigurðr:

Biór færi ec þér,
brynþings apaldr,
magni blandinn
oc megintfri;
fullr er hann lióða
oc lícnstafa,
góðra galdra
oc gamanrúna.

I bring you beer,
apple-tree of the corselet-meeting (i.e.
warrior),
mingled with power
and mighty glory;
it is full of magic songs
and beneficial letters,
of helpful charms
and pleasant runes.

Similarly, in *Hyndluljóð* 45–50, Freyja forces the giantess Hyndla (who is discovered in a cave which may represent the grave) to give her protégé Óttarr a magic drink which will enable him to remember the wisdom Hyndla has recited for him.

The poet of *Ljóðatal* clearly uses the traditional pattern of a sacred number of magic songs that are revealed to the protagonist by a dead relative, but has modified it in two important respects:

1. Instead of the living hero demonstrating his / her courage by facing the unknown dangers inherent in raising a relative from the world of the dead (which in *Hervararkviða*, for example, include supernatural fire in the grave-mound), this poet makes Óðinn travel to the realm of the dead to meet his dead relative. It seems most likely that Óðinn's sufferings in stt. 138–39 are derived from a combination of the ancient rituals of human sacrifice (probably to Óðinn) with some knowledge of the story of the crucifixion of Christ, though without its central idea of moral redemption.
2. Once in the world of the dead, the poet abandons the Christian legend. In place of Christ's quasi-military storming of the gates of Hell, followed by a resurrection which is due to an inherent divine power that Christ has from the beginning, Óðinn claims that he acquired the nine magic songs of the native tradition – but from his unnamed uncle rather than (as we might have expected from the pattern) from his mother. He adds that he began to flourish as a result, and each word he acquired led to a new one – and this element of original creativity is also an addition to the usual pattern.

Why may the poet have chosen to vary the usual pattern by making Óðinn derive a sacred number of magical songs, along with the sacred drink that

conveyed or empowered them, from his maternal uncle rather than his dead mother? If part of his aim was to glorify Óðinn, this would become understandable. The disgraceful connotations of female magic might have demeaned Óðinn's reputation if he had learned the nine magic songs from a woman,⁵⁸ whereas to derive them from his dead uncle would transform this into an initiation for which he had proved his worthiness through courage and suffering.⁵⁹

Even in *Hávamál* as it stands now, the first part of st. 141 points to a complex of various gender relationships:

Pá nam ec frævaz
oc fróðr vera
oc vaxa oc vel hafaz; (*Hávamál* 141,1–3)

It is hardly possible to give a single translation of these lines. The middle-voice verb *frævask* appears elsewhere in Old Norse verse only in Abbot Arngrímr's poem about Bishop Guðmundr (mid-thirteenth century), where it refers allegorically to the bishop 'becoming fertile with seed from the harvest of faith'.⁶⁰ *Fróðr* usually means 'wise', particularly in esoteric information, and could have that sense here, but it has also been convincingly suggested that it may also mean 'having (male) sexual potency', cf. *inn fróði* used as a title of Freyr, Swedish *frodig* 'luxuriant, rich' and *frodlem* 'penis', and perhaps *Fróði*, used as the name of several legendary Danish kings.⁶¹ Such a sense seems likely here, since all the other verbs in this half-stanza also have to do with fertility and growth. *Vaxa* means 'to grow' in any sense: it might refer back to *frævaz* and continue the metaphor of a growing crop, or it could suggest that the swelling inspiration of the poet is like the swelling of a pregnant woman (cf. the phrase *óx brúðar kviðr* 'the bride's belly grew', Björn Hítðælakappi, *Grámagaflm* 2,1; *Skj.* I B, 276 and Kock I, 141, early eleventh century). However, the closest parallel to the expression here is probably *Rígsþula* 22,1–2: *Hann nam at vaxa ok vel dafna* 'He (Karl) began to grow and acquire strength well', where it refers to a boy growing up.⁶²

An attempt to capture the connotations of these lines in modern English might therefore run something like: 'Then I began to be fruitful like a crop, and to be wise and virile, and to grow towards harvest and swell like a pregnant woman, and to grow up and flourish like a healthy child'. This whole complex of meaning is then applied to the way in which each word or deed (i.e. each poetic spell or the practical effect caused by it) enables Óðinn to discover another. In his poetic composition, Óðinn thus likens himself both to a crop-growing field and also to all three parties in the generation of a child. Just as in st. 138 he is the worshipper, the god worshipped and the sacrifice which is the means of worship, here he contrives, in the imagery of sacred poetic composition, to become both the child

reborn from the world of the dead and also both of his own parents.⁶³ While this allows a shadowy role to the instructing maternal uncle, it naturally requires the usual instructing function of the dead mother to be suppressed; all that remains is her name, the minimum hint required to unlock the poetic tradition of the list of magic spells. Otherwise, all emphasis has been switched to the power of the god to obtain wisdom and regeneration for himself.

When we turn to the stanzas that describe the eighteen magic songs, it is noticeable that they divide naturally into two groups of nine. As Elizabeth Jackson has pointed out in a private communication, the beginning of the second group of nine is marked by three lengthened stanzas (stt. 155 and 157 having an extra odd line at the end and st. 156 two extra odd lines). The two groups are also distinguished by content, for most of the first nine songs can be paralleled in *Svipdagsmál* and/or *Sigrdrífumál*. They were probably part of the traditional contents of such lists, and at least one of them must be centuries older than any of these surviving poems. The details are as follows:

Song 1 (st. 146): a general charm, called *Hiálp* 'Help' (cf. *Svipdagsmál* 6).

Song 2 (st. 147): a charm for doctors (cf. *limrúnar*, *Sigrdrífumál* 11).

Song 3 (st. 148): for blunting the weapons of enemies; not exactly paralleled in *Svipdagsmál* or *Sigrdrífumál*, but claimed as part of the knowledge of runes acquired by Konr ungr in *Rígsþula* 43,7, and cf. the general effect of *sigrúnar*, *Sigrdrífumál* 6.

Song 4 (st. 149): for release from fetters; closely paralleled in *Svipdagsmál* 10, and more distantly in the Old High German *First Merseburg Charm*.⁶⁴

Song 5 (st. 150): for stopping an arrow in flight; not paralleled in *Svipdagsmál* or *Sigrdrífumál*, but possibly traditional.⁶⁵

Song 6 (st. 151): for turning a curse back on the sender of it; not paralleled in *Svipdagsmál* or *Sigrdrífumál*, but probably traditional, as we can see from a story in *Göngu-Hrólfs saga* ch. 28.⁶⁶

Song 7 (st. 152): against house fires; not paralleled in *Svipdagsmál* or *Sigrdrífumál*, but cf. the use of runes to allay fires in *Rígsþula* 44,2.

Song 8 (st. 153): for reconciling enemies (cf. *Svipdagsmál* 9; this is also an effect claimed for *málrúnar* in *Sigrdrífumál* 12).

Song 9 (st. 154): for calming storms at sea (cf. *Svipdagsmál* 11, *Rígsþula* 43,8; in *Sigrdrífumál* 10, *brimrúnar* are said to protect a ship in a storm).

Seven of the first nine charms therefore have parallels in *Svipdagsmál*, *Sigrdrífumál* or *Rígsþula*, and all nine may have been traditional. But in the second nine the situation is very different: here, the parallels suggested by the magic songs are not with charms in other traditional sources, but with Óðinn's specialised powers and functions:

- Song 10 (st. 155): against night-riding witches; Óðinn claims that he chants so that they go astray from their own shapes and minds. This has no parallel in *Svipdagsmál* or *Sigrdrífumál*, but resembles Óðinn's boast in *Hárbarðsljóð* 20 that he has deceived *myrcrīðor* 'female riders in the dark' away from their husbands.
- Song 11 (st. 156): for preserving his friends during a battle; not paralleled in *Svipdagsmál* or *Sigrdrífumál*, but there are many legends about Óðinn's patronage of heroes such as Starkaðr, Haraldr hilditǫnnr and Haddingr, which often include protecting them in battle.⁶⁷
- Song 12 (st. 157): to make a hanged man talk with him; not paralleled in *Svipdagsmál* or *Sigrdrífumál*, but Óðinn is familiar as *Hangatýr* 'god of the hanged'.⁶⁸ The early eleventh-century skaldic poet Þórbjörn Brúnason calls him *heimþingaðar hanga* 'visitor of hanged men',⁶⁹ and in *Ynglinga saga* ch. 7, in a context connected with gaining information from the dead, he is said often to have sat down under hanged men.⁷⁰
- Song 13 (st. 158): for throwing water on a young man so that he will not thereafter fall in battle; not paralleled in *Svipdagsmál* or *Sigrdrífumál*. Sprinkling water on new-born infants is common in the sagas, but there has been much debate about whether it was a genuinely pre-Christian practice or not; the surviving sources do not connect it particularly with Óðinn.⁷¹
- Song 14 (st. 159): for counting all the gods and elves; not paralleled in *Svipdagsmál* or *Sigrdrífumál*. Esoteric mythological knowledge is one of Óðinn's special fields; for example, the whole contents of both *Vafþrúðnismál* and *Grímnismál* depend on it.
- Song 15 (st. 160): a charm that was sung by Þjóðreyrir the dwarf 'in front of Dellinger's doors' (apparently = 'at dawn'), giving strength to the Æsir, success to elves and wisdom (or thoughtfulness) to Óðinn himself. This is mysterious, but seems to relate to Óðinn's role as patron of the other gods. It is comparable with *Svipdagsmál* 14 and *Sigrdrífumál* 12–13, especially the *hugrúnar* of *Sigrdrífumál* 13, but *Hávamál* 160 associates the protagonist's wisdom with strength and success rather than grouping it with wit and eloquence, as the other poems do.
- Song 16 (st. 161): for seducing a beautiful woman; not paralleled in *Svipdagsmál* or *Sigrdrífumál*. Seduction runes were certainly used in the thirteenth century,⁷² though earlier examples are harder to find, but seduction (usually for some ulterior motive rather than out of mere passion) is another of Óðinn's special fields, as his encounters with Jǫrð, Rindr, Gríðr and Gunnlǫð bear witness.⁷³
- Song 17 (st. 162,1–3): for keeping a woman's love once he has gained it; not paralleled in *Svipdagsmál* or *Sigrdrífumál*. Again, it seems to be a regular

characteristic both of Óðinn and the Odinic hero that the women or giantesses they seduce remain in love with them.

Song 18 (st. 163): a secret charm, to be told only to his lover or sister; not paralleled in *Svipdagsmál* or *Sigrdrífumál*. The secret to which no one but Óðinn and a close member of his family knows the answer is highly characteristic of him; another example of it is used as the final, contest-deciding question at the ends of *Vafþrúðnismál* and *Gátur Gestumblinda* in *Heiðreks saga*.

It can be seen, therefore, that the second group of nine magic songs is quite different from the first. Only one of them can be linked to the tradition of charms represented by *Svipdagsmál*, *Sigrdrífumál* and *Rígsþula* 43–44 (though one other can be paralleled in practical runology, albeit at a rather late date). No fewer than seven can be related to features of the traditional character of Óðinn himself. This reinforces the idea that the first nine songs are thought of as those that were taught to Óðinn by his mysterious maternal uncle, while the second nine are those he composed for himself. Stt. 155–63 may therefore have seemed more exciting and unpredictable to their first audience than the more traditional stt. 146–54.

Finally, we should note that even though this poet has replaced the traditional female informant with Óðinn's (probably invented) maternal uncle, the eighteen magic songs still begin and end with a female presence. The first begins:

Lióð ec þau kann,
er kannat þjóðans kona
oc mannzcis mögr;

I know those spells
which the ruler's wife does not know
nor anyone's son;

(*Hávamál* 146,1–3)

Such figures as Niðuðr's unnamed queen in *Völundarkviða* and the notorious Queen Gunnhildr suggest that queens were often associated with magical and prophetic skills, and perhaps with the ability to provide supernatural protection for their sons.⁷⁴ It is worth remembering that *mannzcis* is not gender-specific, and it could be interpreted as implying 'nor the son of anyone (else, who has learned magic spells from his mother, even if she is not a queen)'. Similarly, in the last, secret charm it is assumed that transmission from Óðinn himself to the next generation will take place through the agency of women:

Þat kann ec iþ átiánda,
er ec æva kennig
mey né mannz kono –
alt er betra,

I know the eighteenth
which I shall never teach
to maid nor wife of man –
(everything is better

er einn um kann,
 þat fylgir lióða locom –
 nema þeirri einni,
 er mic armi verr
 eða mín systir sé. (*Hávamál* 163)

when only one person knows it,
 that follows at the end of the spells)
 – except only to her
 who embraces me in her arm
 or who may be my sister.

This stanza only makes perfect sense if it is assumed that such magical songs are normally the preserve of women. Because they are dangerous in the wrong hands, the wise son should pass them on only to his wife or sister, because they will become the prophetic mothers of the next generation of his own family.

III. Conclusions

In this essay I have argued that it is possible to analyse with reasonable confidence an Odinic monologue poem which we may call *Ljóðatal* (see Appendix A for a text and parallel translation of it). In it, Óðinn relates how he sacrificed himself to himself on the ash-tree Yggdrasill, and this was probably thought to involve his temporary death, so that he could gain the knowledge of the dead before returning to triumphant and potent life. During his visit to the dead, he learned nine mighty magic songs from his maternal uncle, the brother of his giant mother Bestla, to which he added nine others that he was able to compose for himself as a result of having learned the first nine. The enumeration of what these eighteen magic songs are for provides the substance of the rest of the poem.

Ljóðatal shows some clear signs of Christian influence, but it seems unlikely that any Christian could have composed it without being accused of responsibility for a blasphemous parody of the Crucifixion. It therefore seems likely that it is the work of a heathen poet who was familiar with the basic idea of Christ's death and resurrection but ignorant of or not interested in its motivation. He thus produced a version in which the purpose for which the god gives himself to himself is the pursuit of occult wisdom rather than the spiritual redemption of others. The poem is hard to date, but the most likely period in which this might have happened is probably the later tenth century.

The theory that *Ljóðatal* presents the experience of a priest of Óðinn as he sought mystic union with the god through voluntary suffering seems unlikely. Rather, the poet seems to have modified a traditional myth-pattern in which a living protagonist raises an opposite-sex relative from the dead to provide him with a sacred number of magic charms (probably originally nine). In this case, the original informant was probably his dead mother Bestla. However, the poet

wanted to emphasise Óðinn's heroic achievement in gaining the wisdom of the dead by his sacrifice of himself to himself, and this might have been compromised if it were admitted that he learned it from a woman, so he invents an anonymous giant-uncle who can instruct his sister's son. Even so, the poet suggests that Óðinn's power and wisdom are such that he can use the magic songs he has learned to find out others. It seems possible, although it cannot be proved, that this poet may have been setting up an Odinic 'death and resurrection' as a reaction against the power and appeal of the new religion that was coming from the south, and which would eventually sweep away the worship of *Valföðr* altogether.

APPENDIX

LJÓÐATAL: A Reconstructed Text

138. Veit ek, at ek hekk
vindga meiði á
nætr allar níu,
geiri undaðr
ok gefinn Óðni,
sjálfr sjálfum mér,
á þeim meiði
er manngi veit
hvers hann af rótum renn.

I know that I hung
on a windswept tree
throughout nine nights,
wounded with a spear
and given to Óðinn,
myself to myself,
on that tree
of which no one knows
from what roots it runs.

139. Við hleifi mik sældu
né við hornigi,
nýsta ek niðr.
Nam ek upp rúnar,
cepandi nam,
fell ek apr þaðan.

They did not comfort me with a loaf,
nor with any drinking horn.
I peered downwards.
I picked up the runes/secrets,
shrieking I took them.
I fell back from there.

140. Fimbullióð nío
nam ec af inom frægja syni
Bölþor(n)s, Bestlo fǫður,
oc ec drycc of gat
ins dýra mjaðar,
ausinn Óðreri.

Nine monstrous magic songs
I learned from the famous son
of Bölþor(n), Bestla's father,
and I gained a drink
of the precious mead
sprinkled from Óðreri.

141. Þá nam ec frævaz
oc fróðr vera
oc vaxa oc vel hafaz;
orð mér af orði
orðs leitaði,
verc mér af verki
vercs leitaði.

Then I began to become fruitful
and to be wise and virile
and to grow and flourish;
word from word
sought out word for me,
deed from deed
sought out deed for me.

146. Lióð ec þau kann,
er kannat þjóðans kona
oc mannzcis mögr;

I know those spells
which the ruler's wife does not know
nor any person's son;

hiálp heitir eitt,
enn þat þér hiálpa mun
við sǫcom oc sorgom
oc sútom gorvǫllom.

147. Þat kann ec annat,
er þurfa ýta synir,
þeir er vilja læcnir lífa.

148. Þat kann ec it þriðia,
ef mér verðr þǫrf mikil
haptz við mína heiptmǫgo:
eggjar ec deyi
minna andscota,
bítað þeim vápn né vélir.

149. Þat kann ec it fiórða,
ef mér fyrðar bera
bǫnd at boglimom:
svá ec gel,
at ec ganga má,
spretr mér af fótom fiǫturr,
enn af hǫndom hapt.

150. Þat kann ec it fimta,
ef ec sé af fári scotinn
flein í fólki vaða:
flýgra hann svá stint,
at ec stǫðvigac,
ef ec hann síonom of séc.

151. Þat kann ec it sétta,
ef mic særir þegn
á rótom rás viðar:
oc þann hal,
er mic heipta qveðr,
þann eta mein heldr enn mic.

152. Þat kann ec it siaunda,
ef ec sé hávan loga

one is called 'Help',
and it will help you
against attacks and sorrows
and woes of every kind.

I know the second,
which men's sons need
who want to live as doctors.

I know the third,
if I have great need
of a 'fetter' against my foes:
I blunt the edges
of my enemies –
their weapons and clubs will not bite.

I know the fourth,
if men place on me
bonds, on my bending limbs:
I chant so
that I can walk,
the fetter springs off my feet
and the bonds off my hands.

I know the fifth,
if I see a maliciously shot
arrow coming in battle:
it will not fly so hard
that I do not stop it,
if I see it with my eyes.

I know the sixth,
if a warrior wounds me
on the roots of a sap-filled tree:
and that man
who calls up hatred against me,
harm eats him rather than me.

I know the seventh,
if I see the high hall blazing,

sal um sessmögum:
brennat svá breitt,
at ec hánom biargigac,
þann kann ec galdr at gala.

153. Þat kann ec iþ átta,
er qllom er
nytsamlict at nema:
hvars hatr vex
með hildings sonom,
þat má ec bæta brát.

154. Þat kann ec iþ níunda,
ef mic nauðr um stendr,
at biarga fari míno á floti:
vind ec kyrri
vági á
oc svæfic allan sæ.

155. Þat kann ec iþ tíunda,
ef ec sé túnriðor
leica lopti á:
ec svá vinnc,
at þeir villir fara
sinna heim hama,
sinna heim huga.

156. Þat kann ec iþ ellipta,
ef ec scal til orrosto
leiða langvini:
undir randir ec gel,
enn þeir með ríki fara
heilir hildar til,
heilir hildi frá,
koma þeir heilir hvaðan.

157. Þat kann ec iþ tólpta,
ef ec sé á tré uppi
vafa virgilná:
svá ec ríst

round my bench-mates:
it will not burn so much
that I cannot save it –
I know how to chant that spell.

I know the eighth,
which it is useful
for everyone to learn:
where hatred grows
between a warlike prince's sons,
I can quickly put it right.

I know the ninth,
if the need comes upon me
to save my vessel afloat:
I calm the wind
on the wave
and put the whole sea to sleep.

I know the tenth,
if I see fence-riders
dancing up in the air:
I bring it about
that they go astray
from their own shapes,
from their own minds.

I know the eleventh,
if I must lead
my old friends to battle:
under shields I chant,
and they pass on with power
unharmd to battle,
unharmd from battle,
they come unharmd from everywhere.

I know the twelfth,
if up on a tree I see
a hanged man's corpse swinging:
I carve so

oc í rúnom fác,
at sá gengr gumi
oc mælir við mic.

and colour the runes
that that man walks
and speaks with me.

158. Þat kann ec iþ þrettánda,
ef ec scal þegn ungan
verpa vatni á:
munað hann falla,
þótt hann í fólc komi,
hnígra sá halr fyr hiðrom.

I know the thirteenth,
if I must throw water
onto a young warrior:
he will not fall
though he goes into battle,
that man will not sink before blades.

159. Þat kann ec iþ fiórtánda,
ef ec scal fyrða liði
telia tíva fyrir:
ása oc álfa
ec kann allra scil,
fár kann ósnotr svá.

I know the fourteenth,
if I must list
the gods to a band of men:
of all Æsir and elves
I know the details –
few unwise folk can do that.

160. Þat kann ec iþ fimtánda,
er gól Þjóðrörir,
dvergr, fyr Dellings durom:
afl gól hann ásom,
enn álfom frama,
hyggio Hroptatý.

I know the fifteenth,
which Þjóðreyrir chanted,
a dwarf, before Dellinger's doors:
he chanted strength to Æsir,
success to elves,
and to Óðinn wisdom.

161. Þat kann ec iþ sextánda,
ef ec vil ins svinna mans
hafa geð alt oc gaman:
hugi ec hverfi
hvítarmri kono
oc sný ec hennar ǥllom sefa.

I know the sixteenth,
if I want to have all
a wise girl's love and pleasure:
I turn the thoughts
of the white-armed woman,
and change her mind completely.

162. Þat kann ec iþ siautiánda,
at mic mun seint firraz
iþ manunga man.

I know the seventeenth,
so that the feminine woman
will be reluctant to part from me.

163. Þat kann ec iþ átiánda,
er ec æva kennig
mey né mannz kono –

I know the eighteenth
which I shall never teach
to maid nor wife of man –

alt er betra,
 er einn um kann,
 þat fylgir lióða locom –
 nema þeirri einni,
 er mic armi verr
 eða mín systir sé.

(everything is better
 when only one person knows it,
 that follows at the end of the spells).
 – except only to her
 who embraces me in her arm
 or who may be my sister.

NOTES

- 1 For the argument that this part of *Hávamál* can properly be studied as an autonomous poem, see essay 3 above.
- 2 See Schlosser, ed. (1998), 108; Eis (1964), 58–61.
- 3 See essay 3 above for an explanation of this dating test.
- 4 ‘als Kontamination eines heidnischen Initiationsritus mit dem Kreuzestod Christi zu deuten ist’ (von See, [1972a], 1).
- 5 For Eyvindr’s *Háleygjatal*, see *Skj* I A, 68–71, I B, 60–62; Kock I, 37–39.
- 6 On the mystery associated with this, see Fleck (1971b), 386–89.
- 7 For *Hangi*, see Tindr Hallkelson, *Hákonardrápa* 1,5 (c.987, *Skj.* I B, 136; Kock I, 75); for *Hangagoð*, Hávarðr halti Ísfríðingr, *lausavísa* 14,4, early eleventh century (*Skj.* I B, 182; Kock I, 96); for *Hangatýr*, Víga-Glúmr, *lausavísa* 10,2 (c.985, *Skj.* I B, 114; Kock I, 65).
- 8 See *Pula IV* jj 5,7 and 3,7 (*Skj.* I B, 673; Kock I, 337). Kure (2006) suggests that the name *Yggdrasil* may refer to the tree, not as Óðinn’s ‘gallows’, but rather as his ‘horse’ or means of transportation to the world of the dead, but knowledge of the myth of Óðinn’s sacrifice would still be required even if this is correct. In defence of the traditional interpretation, several later medieval European texts refer to Christ on the Cross as a jousting knight (see e.g. Langland, *Piers Plowman* B, xviii.18–26, ed. Schmidt [1978], p. 220), and some refer explicitly to the Cross as Christ’s horse (e.g. the Towneley *Crucifixion* lines 114, 201f., ed. Stevens and Cawley [1994], 290, 293, 576–77); Kure’s alternative suggestion, that *Yggdrasil* may be a name for Óðinn himself, seems less convincing.
- 9 Lindqvist (1941–42), I, figs 81–82, II, 83–86; also illustrated in Turville-Petre (1964), plate 25.
- 10 Bragi, unplaced verse 2,2, *Skj.* I B, 4; Kock I, 3; and see Simek (1993), 124.
- 11 See *Hávamál*, ed. Evans (1986), 30–31. and compare Turville-Petre (1964), 43.
- 12 See Lindqvist (1941–42), I, figs 128–31, II, 80–81; for other illustrations, see e.g. Turville-Petre (1964), plate 24; Ellis Davidson (1967), plate 54.
- 13 *FSN* III, 27; *Gautreks Saga*, trans. Pálsson and Edwards (1968), 41.

- 14 Gwyn Jones (1968), 428; compare Franklin and Shepard (1996), 61.
- 15 See Kemper (2006), 436–81. I am grateful to Nigel Palmer for drawing my attention to this information.
- 16 Adam of Bremen IV, ch. 27, ed. Lappenberg (1876), 259; trans. Tschan (1959), 208.
- 17 Ed. Winterbottom and Ogilvie (1975), 42; ed. Anderson (1938); trans. Rives (1999), 80–81 and notes on pp. 156–59.
- 18 Glob (1959), ch. 1 and plates 1–7; see especially p. 29.
- 19 Glob (1959), 66–70.
- 20 See e.g. the Crucifixion in the Durham Gospels, MS Durham Cathedral A.II.17, fol. 38v, ca.700 (Webster and Backhouse [1992], 115).
- 21 See e.g. Beckwith (1989), 66 (an ivory book-cover from Metz, ca. 900, inscription IES NAZARE / NUS REX IV); 137 (an ivory book-cover with jewels and gold frame from Trier, 983–91, inscription HCAZAREN); Campbell (1982), 183 (an English late-tenth-century crucifix of ivory, gold, and enamel, now in the Victoria and Albert Museum, inscription HSNASA / RENVS), and 206 (MS BL Harley 2904, fol. 3v, a later tenth-century Crucifixion drawing, probably from Winchester, inscription HIC EST NAZARE / N' IHC REX IUDEOR-).
- 22 ed. Anderson (1938); trans. Rives (1999), 81. Some older translations render Tacitus's 'notis quibusdam' as 'with certain runes', but it is far from certain that runic script had developed by Tacitus's time; see McKinnell, Simek and Düwel (2004), 13, 40.
- 23 See Dronke II, 152; alternatively, this could refer to the reading of splashes of sacrificial blood scattered at random from a sprinkling twig, as suggested by Sigurður Nordal (ed. *Vǫluspá* [1978], 115).
- 24 See McKinnell and Ruggerini (1994), ch. 4, especially 100–01.
- 25 Fleck (1971a); Clunies Ross (1994), 225–28; Kure (2006).
- 26 Clunies Ross (1994–98), I, 226; cf. Kure (2006), 69.
- 27 Grønvik (1999); Grønvik (2000).
- 28 Myhren (2001).
- 29 Alternatively, Fleck (1971a), 120–29 argues that Óðinn is hanged by the feet (like the 'hanged man' in the Tarot pack), so that he can pick up rune-sticks that are scattered below him; but none of the Norse parallels he is able to cite is presented as a sacrifice. The clearly sacrificial examples (the Tollund man, the hanged figure on Lärbro Stora Hammars Stone 1 and King Víkarr in *Gautreks saga*, see below) are all unambiguously hanged by the neck.
- 30 *FSN* III, 27; *Gautreks Saga*, trans. Hermann Pálsson and Edwards (1968), 40–41.
- 31 Lindqvist (1941–42), I, figs 81–82, II, 83–86; also illustrated e.g. in McKinnell and Ruggerini (1994), plate 3 and Turville-Petre (1964), plate 25.
- 32 Adam of Bremen, IV.27 and scholium b; ed. Schmeidler (1917), 259–60; trans. Tschan (1959), 208.

- 33 Literally ‘word from word sought out a word for me ...’
- 34 *Klaeber’s Beowulf*, ed. Fulk, Bjork, Niles and Damico (2008), 6.
- 35 *Waldere*, ed. Zettersten (1979), 19 and note on p. 27.
- 36 See BT 286; for examples, see *The Metres of Boethius* 26,26, ed. Krapp (1932b), 193; *Elene* 237, ed. Krapp (1932a) 72.
- 37 In a recent, unpublished paper (October 2012), Henning Kure has suggested that this may refer to Suttungr. This would explain the appearance of Óðrerir in this stanza, but would also imply a version of the myth of Óðinn’s acquisition of the mead of poetry which was quite different from the Gunnlǫð story.
- 38 Einarr skálaglamm, *Vellekla* 4,2, ed. in *Skj.* I A, 123 (Codex Regius reading ‘betzlv’ corrected to ‘beztlv’, other MSS ‘bestlo’ (T), ‘bestlv’ (W), ‘bezlo’ (U), ‘beslu’ (AM 757, 4to), I B, 117 and Kock I, 66; Steinarr Sjónason, *lausavísa* 2,6, ed. in *Skj.* I A, 95 (MS reading *blestu*), I B, 89; Kock I, 53.
- 39 ed. Faulkes (1982), 11; trans. Faulkes (1987), 11.
- 40 For discussions of it see *AEW* 34; Simek (1993), 35–36; Sturtevant (1952), 1156–57.
- 41 The last is an emendation of the meaningless MS reading *bestibysima* in *Vǫlundarkviða* 12,3, and so not certainly correct, but its first element seems fairly secure.
- 42 Further on this idea, see Dronke II, 107.
- 43 Schröder (1941) 69; it is true that the rune for r was called *ýr* ‘yew tree’ (see Moltke [1985], 37), but there is no evidence to link this to Bestla. Sturtevant’s theory relies on the image of the fates spinning, which is a classical idea not usually found in Norse sources; further on this, see Bek-Pedersen (2006 and 2011).
- 44 ed. Haugen (1972), 28–29.
- 45 *Pórsdrápa* 2,4, 7,6 (where the Codex Regius text of *Skáldskaparmál* actually reads *þoms* in both cases, emended by all editors to *þorns*), and cf. also *þornrannr* (‘giant’s hall’), *Pórsdrápa* 13,2 (ed. in *Skj.* I A, 148–50 and I B, 139–42; Kock I, 76–77; *Skáldskaparmál*, ed. Faulkes [1998], I, 26–28; trans. Faulkes [1987], 83–85).
- 46 See respectively *Skj.* I B, 386 (and Kock I, 192), and McKinnell, Simek and Düwel (2004), 126–27.
- 47 *Vǫluspá* 27; *Gylfaginning*, ch. 15, ed. Faulkes (1982), 17, trans. Faulkes (1987), 17.
- 48 See e.g. Clunies Ross (1994–98), I, 212–15, and for the idea of an initiation ritual, *ibid.*, 225.
- 49 ed. Faulkes (1998), I, 3, trans. Faulkes (1987), 62.
- 50 Simek (1993), 250; *AEW* 416.
- 51 See *Hávamál*, ed. Evans (1986), 135; SG III.i, 151. Svava Jakobsdóttir (2002), 32–33 argues that the name refers to the container in both places, but this relies on

- the assumption that *Hávamál* stt. 107 and 140 are parts of the same original poem, and does not consider the derivation of the name.
- 52 See e.g. Tacitus, *Germania*, ch. 20 (ed. Winterbottom and Ogilvie [1975], 47–48; ed. Anderson [1938]; trans. Rives [1999], 85); further see SG III.i, 151 and Clunies Ross (1994–98), I, 227.
- 53 Further on this pattern, see McKinnell (2005), 197–217.
- 54 *Svipdagsmál* is not included in N-K, but see SG I, 194–213; related to it are the Danish ballad *Ungen Sveidal* (*Danmarks gamle folkeviser*, ed. Grundtvig et al. [1853–1967], no. 70, II, 238–54) and the folktale *Himinbjargar saga* (see Falk [1892–93], 314–15).
- 55 In *Sigrdrífumál* as we now have it, the valkyrie Sigrdrífa is sleeping rather than dead, but two phrases suggest that this is a recent change to the story: *fplvar nauðir* ('pale bonds') (*Sigrdrífumál* 1,4) is most easily understood as referring to the strips of white cloth that were used to wrap a corpse (see Mundal [1972]); and *hrælundir* ('?white strips on a corpse') (*Sigrdrífumál* 1,7) probably has the same meaning (see Myhren [1972]).
- 56 In *Hervararkviða* (see *Saga Heiðreks konungs ins vitra*, ed. Tolkien [1960], 10–19, 76–79) the significant modifications are that the gender roles are reversed and the request for protective spells is replaced by one for a sword.
- 57 *Völuspá* and *Baldrs draumar* are probably textually related. In the latter the *völva* is explicitly stated to have been dead for a long time and to be forced to rise by Óðinn's magic, though it is not said that there is any family relationship between them. In *Völuspá* the *völva*'s status is enigmatic: she remembers the nine worlds of the dead (st. 2), but 'sits out' (st. 28) as a living *völva* might do in order to raise the dead; however, the result is that the living Óðinn comes to her. Again, no relationship between Óðinn and the *völva* is stated; Óðinn has demanded a sequence of pieces of sacred information from her, but it is not cast in terms of a sacred number.
- 58 For attitudes to female magic, see e.g. *Ynglinga saga*, ch. 7: 'En þessi fjölkynngi, er framið er, fylgir svá mikil ergi, at eigi þótti karlmönnum skammlaust við at fara, ok var gyðjunum kennd sú fþrótt' ('But when this magic is performed, it is accompanied by such great (sexual) depravity, that it was thought shameful for males to be involved in it, and that accomplishment was taught to the priestesses') (ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson [1941], ÍF 26, 19); further, see Ström (1974), 8–10.
- 59 See Clunies Ross (1994–98), I, 225–27.
- 60 Arngrímr ábóti Brandsson, *Guðmundar kvæði byskups* 15,8 (*Skj.* II, 376; Kock II, 203).
- 61 See *Hávamál*, ed. Evans (1986), 135; AEW 143–44.
- 62 For a more elaborate investigation of the sexual symbolism in Óðinn's self-sacrifice, see Fleck (1971b), 398–403.

- 63 Clunies Ross (1994–98), I, 222–23 also suggests that *ausinn Óðrerir* in st. 140,6 could modify *ec* (st. 140,4) and mean ‘and I, sprinkled from Óðrerir, got a drink of the precious mead’. It seems to me that in a half-stanza where the main subject is the sacred drink, this is unlikely to be the primary sense, but it may very well be a secondary one, referring to the sprinkling of water on a new-born child. This is often said to have been done by heathens (see de Vries [1956–57], § 137, and in *Hávamál* 158, Óðinn’s protection of a *þegn ungan* by throwing water on him may refer to it). It is hard to know whether it was an indigenous feature of heathenism, an actual late heathen practice adopted in imitation of Christian baptism, or merely a supposition by medieval Christians about what their heathen forebears ‘must have done’. If it was a real late-heathen practice, however, this subsidiary sense in st. 140,6 may lead on to Óðinn’s comparison of himself to a growing child in the next stanza.
- 64 Ed. Schlosser (1998), 108; see Eis (1964) 58–61, and McKinnell (2005), 199, 205.
- 65 In *Ketils saga hængs*, ch. 3 (*FSN* I, 254–55), the giant Gusi can be killed by the hero because of a magic spell which creates the illusion that his last arrow is bent (i.e. that it will not fly straight). It is possible that this motif preserves a distorted memory of the same kind of charm.
- 66 See *FSN* II, 425–26. The dwarf Mǫndull uses magical runes to distort the malicious magic of twelve *seiðmenn* who have cast spells to make Hrólfr and his associate Stefnir kill themselves. The result is that the magic is turned against the magicians themselves and they all run out of the building, throw themselves into bogs or the sea, or off rocks or cliffs, and kill themselves in this way.
- 67 For a summary account of these three heroes as protégés of Óðinn, see Turville-Petre (1964), 205–16.
- 68 See e.g. Víga-Glúmr, *lausavísa* 10,2 (*Skj.* I B, 114; Kock I, 65).
- 69 Þórbjörn Brúnason, *lausavísa* 3,7 (*Skj.* I B, 199; Kock I, 104).
- 70 Ed. Bjarni Aðalbarnarson (1941), ÍF 26, 18. Snorri may here have been influenced by *Hávamál* 157, but the skaldic references cited above make it seem unlikely that this was his only source.
- 71 One apparent reference to a decree of the year 732 by St. Boniface, Archbishop of Mainz, that people who had been ‘baptized’ by the heathen must be re-baptized in the name of the Holy Trinity (De Vries [1956–57], § 137, I, 180) might seem to settle the matter, but it seems difficult to exclude the possibility that Boniface is referring to verbally incompetent baptism, or to baptism by heretical Christians who did not believe in the Trinity.
- 72 See e.g. the seduction charm from Bergen (B 257), analysed by Liestøl (1963), 41–50; *Egils saga*, ch. 76 (ed. Sigurður Nordal [1933], ÍF 2, 238; trans. Fell [1975], 141) describes an incompetent attempt to use seduction runes which only succeeds in making the woman ill.

73 See McKinnell (2005), 147–71.

74 Gunnhildr was known by the title *konungamóðir* ‘mother of kings’. According to *Haralds saga hárfagra*, ch. 32 (ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson [1941], ÍF 26, 135–36), Eiríkr blóðøx discovered her while she was learning magic from two Lapps in Finnmark, and almost the last initiative of her long and wicked career in Norway is an offer to foster the young Óláfr Tryggvason (*Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*, ch. 5, ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson [1941], ÍF 26, 229).

6 The Paradox of *Vafþrúðnismál*

I. Date and Provenance

Most opinion has placed the composition of *Vafþrúðnismál*¹ in the tenth century, and one recent scholar has even suggested that Boer's early-tenth-century dating may underestimate the poem's age,² but there is actually too little evidence on which to base such judgements.

Two details have been argued to indicate a late (possibly twelfth-century) date for the poem. Ulrike Sprenger (1985), 188 has maintained that the word *kaldrifiaðan* (*Vafþrúðnismál* 10,6, literally 'cold-ribbed', i.e. perhaps 'cold-hearted, ruthless') includes the concept of the emotions being seated in the heart, which she regards as a Christian European idea that could not have reached Iceland before the twelfth century. But the words *brjóst* and *hjarta* are applied to emotions by skaldic poets at least from the early eleventh century onwards (e.g. Sigvatr uses the phrase *í brjósti* to define the seat of his own emotions in his *lausavísa* 24,3 (ca. 1031; *Skj.* I B, 252; Kock I, 130) and *hjörtu hugfull* 'brave hearts' in *Bersöglisvísur* 3,5–6 (ca. 1038; *Skj.* I B, 235; Kock I, 122), and it would be easy to cite further examples from the same period.³ *Kaldr* is used in the sense 'malicious' or 'ill-omened' in poems which Sprenger accepts as ancient (e.g. *Völundarkviða* 31,6, *Atlakviða* 2,6). Sabine Walther argues in a forthcoming article that st. 21, on the creation of the earth from Ymir's body, and the similar *Grímnismál* 40–41, are indebted to twelfth century learned sources; I cannot yet comment on this view.

On the other hand, Bjarne Fidjestøl has shown that the incidence of the expective particle *um/of* in skaldic verse becomes steadily rarer over time, and suggests⁴ that the same test may also be applied to the dating of eddic verse, although only to give a general indication of relative date. Of course it is true that, since the metres of eddic poetry are looser and more easily modified than

those of skaldic poetry, the texts we have may sometimes have been modified by oral performers long after their original composition, but this would be more likely to reduce instances of the expletive particle than to increase them. *Vafþrúðnismál* shows an unusually high usage of it:

Figure 6.1

Lines	Average incidence	Actual incidence	Deviation	Deviation per 100 lines
331	7.8	17	+9.2	+2.76

On this test, the poem would be among the three or four oldest in the Poetic Edda. However, it may also be worth noting that all seventeen instances are in the two middle sections of the poem (Vafþrúðnir's questions to Óðinn and Óðinn's first twelve questions to the giant), and this raises the possibility that details or whole sections of the poem may have remained subject to change; in that case, no single textual point can be used to demonstrate either early or late date for the poem as a whole. An overall consideration of the poem's argument (see below) makes it look heathen in outlook, but whether that heathenism is real or an imaginative construct by the poet must remain a matter of opinion.

II. Formal Structure

Counsel shall keep thee, and prudence shall preserve thee;
that thou mayst be delivered from the evil way,
and from the man that speaketh perverse things.

(Proverbs 2,11–12)

Vafþrúðnismál has sometimes been thought shapeless,⁵ but in fact it has a clearly articulated four-part structure in which the major sections are distinguished by change of location, questioner and/or refrain. This structure is summarised below, with the abbreviations 1R, 2R 3R used to indicate the first, second and third refrains, Ó. for Óðinn and V. for Vafþrúðnir.

A. Prologue: Óðinn and Frigg in Ásgarðr (1–5):

- 1) Ó. announces his desire to visit and question V.; Frigg tries to dissuade him (1–2).

- 2) Ó. repeats his determination; Frigg sends him on his way with a blessing (3–4). (3R in stanza 3).

Coda) Ó. makes the journey and enters V.'s hall (5).

- B. Vafþrúðnir questions Óðinn (6–19) (1R begins the explicit questions, stanzas 11, 13, 15, 17):

- a) The Arrival of the Guest (6–10):

Introduction) Ó. greets V. and declares that he wants to know how wise the giant is (6).

- 1) V. asks who the newcomer is, and wishes that he may never get out of the hall unless he proves to be the wiser of the two of them; Ó. says he is a traveller called Gagnráðr (probably meaning 'The Disputant') (7–8).⁶
- 2) V. invites 'Gagnráðr' to sit, and challenges him to a contest of knowledge; Ó. says that a poor man visiting a rich one must say what is needed or else be silent, and that being too talkative gets one into trouble in the face of someone crafty (see Section 4 below) (9–10).

- b) Vafþrúðnir questions his 'Challenger' (11–19) (1R begins each question, stanzas 11, 13, 15, 17):

- 3) V. asks the name of the horse of day; Ó. names him as Scinfaxi (11–12).
- 4) V. asks the name of the horse of night; Ó. names him as Hrímfaxi (13–14).
- 5) V. asks the name of the river dividing giants and gods; Ó. names it as Ifing (15–16).
- 6) V. asks the name of the field where Surtr (the fire demon) and the gods will fight (i.e. at Ragnarøk); Ó. names it as Vígríðr (17–18).

Coda) V. acknowledges his guest's wisdom, invites him to share his seat, and announces that they will wager their lives on the result of the contest (19).

- C. Óðinn questions Vafþrúðnir on the past and present in twelve numbered questions (20–43) (2R begins each question, stanzas 20, 22, 24, 26, 28, 30, 32, 34, 36, 38, 40, 42):

- 1) What is the origin of earth and sky? V. replies that they were made from the body of the giant Ymir (20–21).
- 2) What is the origin of moon and sun? V. replies that they are the children of Mundilfœri (22–23).
- 3) What is the origin of day and night? V. replies that their fathers are Dellir and Nørr (24–25).
- 4) What is the origin of winter and summer? V. replies that their fathers are Vindsvalr and Svásuðr (26–27).⁷

- 5) Who was the first of gods or giants? V. replies that Bergelmir was born countless years before the earth was made, and his father and grandfather were Prúðgelmir and Aurgelmir (28–29).
- 6) What was the origin of Aurgelmir? V. replies that he grew out of drops of yeast that had come from Élivágar (30–31).
- 7) How did the primeval giant get offspring? V. replies that one of his feet begat a son on the other (32–33).
- 8) What is the oldest thing V. himself remembers? V. replies that it is the birth (or death?)⁸ of Bergelmir (34–35).
- 9) Where does wind come from? V. replies that it is from the flapping of the wings of the eagle-formed giant Hræsvelgr (36–37).
- 10) How did Njǫrðr come among the Æsir?⁹ V. replies that he was given as a hostage by the Vanir, and will return to them at Ragnarǫk (38–39).
- 11) Where do the *einherjar* (Óðinn's chosen warriors) fight each day? The text of the question makes sense, but the stanza is probably incomplete; V. replies that they do so in Óðinn's meadow, and that afterwards they ride from the fight and sit reconciled together (40–41).
- 12) How does V. know all the secrets of gods and giants? V. replies that he has been to the nine worlds below Niflhel, into which human beings die from Hel (42–43).¹⁰ These stanzas also include Ó.'s acknowledgement of V.'s wisdom, and V.'s own reassertion of it, and thus parallel the end of section B.

D. Óðinn questions Vafprúðnir about the future at and after Ragnarǫk (44–55) (3R begins each question, stanzas 44, 46, 48, 50, 52, 54):

- 1) What human beings will survive when Fimbulvetr (the 'terrible winter' before Ragnarǫk) is past? V. replies that Líf and Lífþrasir will survive, will feed on morning dew, and become the ancestors of later generations (i.e. after Ragnarǫk) (44–45).
- 2) How will there be a sun after she has been swallowed by the wolf Fenrir? V. replies that the sun will be succeeded by her daughter (46–47).
- 3) What wise maidens pass over the sea? V.'s reply is even more obscure than the question, but seems to refer to the presence in the world of three benevolent female guardian spirits of giant origin (48–49).¹¹
- 4) Which of the Æsir will survive Ragnarǫk? V. Names Víðarr, Váli, Móði and Magni (50–51).
- 5) How will Óðinn die at Ragnarǫk? V. replies that the Wolf will swallow him, and he will be avenged by Víðarr (52–53).

- 6) What did Óðinn whisper in the ear of his son (i.e. the dead Baldr) before the latter was put on the funeral pyre? V. cannot answer this question, for no one but Óðinn knows; he realises that he is doomed, and that he has shared his wisdom with Óðinn, the wisest of beings. This final acknowledgement of the opponent's wisdom parallels the ends of sections B and C (54–55).

The poem thus consists of a Prologue and a three-part Debate. The Prologue in Ásgarðr and the Arrival of the Guest are both traditional scenes,¹² and the same is true of the Debate, as we shall see (see Section 3 below). The twelve numbered questions of the Debate's middle section are a prominent structural feature, and the last section contains six questions. The first part of the debate includes only four questions explicitly marked by the first refrain, but two previous ones may be implied:

- 1) Who are you? (Óðinn avoids having to reveal himself or tell a lie by giving a name that describes his function without revealing his identity) (7–8);
- 2) Do you dare to take a seat, and thus accept the threat of death if you lose the contest? (Óðinn is again evasive, posing as a poor visitor who is at the mercy of his host) (9–10).

It may thus be suggested that the questions in the Debate have a 6–12–6 pattern, or alternatively (as has been suggested by Ruggerini)¹³ that Óðinn's last two questions are not a true part of the contest, and that the real pattern is thus 4–12–4. It is certainly true that the internal organisation of the middle section is in groups of four questions, so the latter view may be preferable. But in either case, there is a clear overall pattern, not a mere chaotic sequence.

Further analysis shows that the structure has a thematic as well as a formal significance. The boundaries between sections all emphasise the overall theme of wisdom by the device of making one of the contestants dwell admiringly on the wisdom of the other:

‘hitt vil ec fyrst vita, ef þú fróðr sér
eða alsviðr, iqtunn.’ (6,4–6)

‘The first thing I want to know, giant,
is whether you are wise or (possibly
‘and’) all-knowing.’

‘Fróðr ertu nú, gestr,’ (19,1)

‘You are wise, now, stranger,’

‘Frá iqtna rúnom ok allra goða
segir þú iþ sannasta,
inn allsvinni iqtunn.’ (42,4–7).

‘About the secrets of giants and of
all the gods you speak most truly,
you all-knowing giant.’

‘Nú ec við Óðin deildac mína
orðspeki –
þú ert æ vísastr vera.’ (55,7–9)

‘Now I have shared my cleverness in
words with Óðinn – you are always
the wisest of beings.’

In st. 6, Óðinn’s praise may be double-edged, and it seems to be taken by Vafþrúðnir as a verbal attack, since he reacts aggressively:

‘Hvat er þat manna, er í mínom sal
verpome orði á?
Út þú né komir órom hollom frá,
nema þú inn snotrari sér.’ (7)

‘What man is it who attacks me with
speech in my hall?¹⁴
May you not get out of our hall unless
you are the wiser.’

At the end of section C the praise-giver is Óðinn, while in sections B and D it is Vafþrúðnir. But the cunning Óðinn, who wants to put his opponent off his guard, is more effusive in his praise than the rather arrogant giant, who gives Óðinn less than his due until it is too late.

There is also a rough parallel between the shapes of the subject-matter covered in the questions of sections B and C. Vafþrúðnir’s first two formal questions to Óðinn are about the natural world (11, 13); he then moves on to the division between giants and gods (15), presumably because giants are thought of as the patrons of natural forces; and his last question is about the confrontation between Surtr (the ultimate representative of a natural force, namely fire) and the gods at Ragnarök (17). In the same way, Óðinn begins with four questions about the natural world (20, 22, 24, 26); then he proceeds to another four about giants (28, 30, 32, 34). The last four questions of section C do not as a whole parallel Vafþrúðnir’s last question, but three of them might be seen as repeating the sequence of Section B, with one question each about nature (36), the gods (38) and (by implication) Ragnarök, since that is what the *einherjar* are training for (40). The last question of section C (42) has its own, deeper function (see below).

But along with this rough parallel there goes a significant difference. Vafþrúðnir’s questions are all about names; they seem to reflect, on the level of Vafþrúðnir’s view, the ancient belief that possession of a mere name gives power over the thing,¹⁵ and on that of the poet, the perception that this kind of mythological information is no more than an empty parade of knowledge without wisdom, reflecting Vafþrúðnir’s arrogance but no real understanding of the world. He is like the botanical pedant aimed at in Thomas Morell’s libretto for Handel’s *Solomon*:

What though I trace each herb and flow’r
That drinks the morning dew,

Did I not own Jehovah's pow'r
How vain were all I knew!

Say what's the rest but empty boast,
The pedant's idle claim,
Who having all the substance lost
Attempts to grasp a name?¹⁶

Óðinn is not of course concerned with 'Jehovah's pow'r', but he is interested in origins rather than mere names, and in Section D it emerges that for him, as probably for the poet, origins and endings are intimately related, so that one cannot understand the one without the other. There is thus a clear distinction between Óðinn's wisdom and the giant's mere information; it is a distinction which is also made by the poet of *Alvíssmál*, who allows the dwarf Alvið ('All Knowing') to revel in his knowledge of mere names for so long that Þórr is able to delay him until the sun rises and turns him to stone (N-K 129).

III. The Received Story

So to gain time Gollum challenged Bilbo to the Riddle-game, saying that if he asked a riddle which Bilbo could not guess, then he would kill him and eat him.¹⁷

Before isolating what is particular in the way this poetic voice handles his material, it is necessary to outline what was probably already traditional in his story. A similar tale appears in *Heiðreks saga* ch. 9,¹⁸ where Óðinn impersonates Gestumblindi, one of his devotees, and appears at the summons of the unjust King Heiðrekr, who is Gestumblindi's enemy. (In fact, Gestumblindi must originally have been a name for Óðinn himself, referring to the fact that he is a visitor with one eye).¹⁹ Rather than submit to the sentence of Heiðrekr's counsellors, the supposed Gestumblindi chooses to engage in a riddle contest, in which he asks questions which the King must answer; the unstated implication seems to be that he will be released if he can ask a riddle which the King cannot answer, but killed if he runs out of riddles first, or if the King discovers that he is not the real Gestumblindi. What follows is a succession of actual riddles quite unlike the mythological questions in *Vafþrúðnismál* (though one or two of them have answers referring to the gods); but the last question is the same as in *Vafþrúðnismál*. When Heiðrekr hears it, he says:

'Þat veiztu einn, rög vættr.'

'Only you know that, vile creature.'²⁰

and strikes at Óðinn with the sword Tyrfingr, which has been lying on his knees; but Óðinn changes into a falcon and escapes, and the sword merely cuts short the falcon's tail-feathers, so that they have been short ever since.

The end of this story contradicts the rest of the saga, in which it is said that the sword could not be drawn without killing someone. But *Heiðrekr* is to suffer a memorable death in the next chapter of the saga, and that is probably why he does not die here. The traditional ending was probably that found in the prose paragraph at the end of *Grímnismál*, in which Óðinn confronts the evil King Geirroðr.²¹ when the king hears that his visitor is Óðinn, he gets up, but his sword slips from his hand, he stumbles and is run through and killed by his own sword (N-K 68). Perhaps we should assume that *Vafþrúðnir* will die in the same way.

It seems very unlikely that this tale originated with King *Heiðrekr*: it has clearly been adapted to him, both in the invention of a man called *Gestumblindi* who is not Óðinn, and in the bathetic ending in which the required death of the king does not take place. But it is equally unlikely that the author of *Heiðreks saga* (who uses much ancient material not found elsewhere) derived it from *Vafþrúðnismál*: the name *Gestumblindi*, the confrontation with a king rather than a giant (which is shared by the prose epilogue to *Grímnismál*) and the story of why the falcon has a short tail all suggest an independent Odinic source, now lost. In fact, there was probably an extensive tradition of the wisdom or riddle contest in various parts of northern Europe, for it survives into later ballads like the English *Inter Diabolus et Virgo*²² and some versions of the Danish *Svend Vonved*.²³ Christian influence on these ballads has changed the questioning Óðinn into a demon and his opponent from a wicked king into a humble but virtuous human being who eventually triumphs over him, usually by naming (i.e. symbolically recognising) the devil. But the pattern was clearly widespread, and *Heiðreks saga* and *Vafþrúðnismál* almost certainly embody independent examples of it.

This suggests that the poet used a traditional story pattern including the following features:

1. Óðinn adopts a disguise in order to engage in a wisdom contest with an evil king or giant; it takes place in the hall of his opponent.
2. Óðinn asks the questions; he will win if he can ask a question that his opponent cannot answer. The opponent will win if Óðinn either runs out of questions or is unmasked.
3. The loser of the contest will die.
4. It is possible that the opponent begins to suspect towards the end that his adversary is sheltering behind a false identity; when 'Gestumblindi' sets a riddle which implies knowledge of how many piglets *Heiðrekr*'s pregnant sow will have, the King responds:

‘Ef þú ert sá Gestumblindi, sem ek hugða, þá ertu vitrari en ek ætlaða.’

‘If you are the same Gestumblindi as I thought, then you’re cleverer than I expected.’²⁴

He subsequently suspects who the man must be (but presumably cannot be certain of it). This could be a detail specific to *Heiðreks saga*, but as the king in the prose frame to *Grímnismál* also has Óðinn tortured in an attempt to make him reveal who he is (N-K 57), it may be part of the received pattern. It certainly has the function of raising suspense.

5. Óðinn wins by asking what he whispered in the ear of the dead Baldr.
6. The opponent acknowledges his defeat and dies, probably by stumbling and being run through with his own sword.

But the reason why Óðinn undertakes the contest, the structure of it, the identity of his opponent, the questions asked (except the last one),²⁵ and any connection with the rest of Óðinn’s career seem to vary from one version to another, and must therefore be taken to reflect the particular outlook of the *Vafþrúðnismál* poet (by which I mean the person responsible for the poem in the form in which it now survives).

IV. Fate: The Logical Dilemma

‘Kveld lifir maðr ekki
eptir kvíð norna.’

‘No one lives an evening
after the norms’ decree.’

(*Hamðismál* 30,7–8)

Vafþrúðnismál contains at its heart what seems at first to be a serious logical contradiction. When Óðinn first announces his intention of visiting the giant, Frigg tries to dissuade him:

‘þvíat engi iqtun ec hugða
iafnramman
sem Vafþrúðni vera.’ (2,4–6)

‘because I thought no giant as strong
as Vafþrúðnir.’

The clear implication is that the mission is a dangerous one, and this impression is strengthened by Frigg’s farewell blessing, in which she wishes that Óðinn may

go and return safely (st. 4, 1–3). Exactly how Óðinn overcomes her reluctance to let him go is not clear, but it is interesting that the opening of his reply:

‘Fjölð ec fór, fjölð ec freistaða,
fjölð ec reynda regin’; (3, 1–3)

‘I have travelled much, I have at-
tempted much,
much I have tested the powers’;

later becomes the third refrain; perhaps his meaning here is that he has undertaken many such quests before and always survived them. In that case, the third refrain, when it returns to preface his last series of questions to the giant, is a piece of bravado, asserting his own security while coming perilously close to revealing who he is.²⁶

At the opening of section B, Vafþrúðnir immediately strengthens this air of danger by wishing that his visitor may not get out of his hall unless he proves to be the wiser (7, 4–6); Óðinn himself appears to agree that he is in danger when he implies that he is forced to accept the initial challenge, but adds:

‘ofrmælgí mikil hygg ec at illa geti,
hveim er við kaldrífiðan kómr.’ (10, 4–6)

‘I think much chattering comes to a bad end,
for the person who encounters someone cunning.’²⁷

In fact this is double-edged, and what he really means is that the giant’s careless words will lead him to disaster when faced with Óðinn’s own cunning; but at the time, the words remain ambiguous and heighten our sense of suspense and danger. This sense of risk is essential to the interest and excitement of the poem, and it reaches a point of no turning back when the giant stipulates that they must wager their lives on the outcome (19, 4–6). It must be the giant who insists on the head-wager, since it increases the irony of his eventual fall if he is responsible for it himself, and prevents us from feeling that Óðinn has simply tricked him out of his life.

Before the decisive final section of the contest, the suspense is heightened further by stanza 43, in which Vafþrúðnir reveals the source of his knowledge: he has derived it from the dead in the nine worlds below Niflhel.²⁸ This makes him the equal of Óðinn himself, who is also known in skaldic verse as *Hangaguð* or *Hangatýr*, ‘god of the hanged’ (LP 227), who knows how to make a hanged man speak to him (*Hávamál* 157), and who even sought the wisdom of the dead by hanging on a wind-swept tree himself (*Hávamál* 138–41; see also Lärbro Stora Hammars Stone 1²⁹ and the implied knowledge of the myth in the name of the World Tree *Yggdrasill*, literally ‘The Terrifier’s

(Óðinn's) horse', as a hanged man is said to 'ride' on the gallows). If the giant's sources of information are equal to Óðinn's own, the god has no automatic guarantee of victory.

And yet the questions posed in the wisdom contest seem constantly to undermine this sense of unpredictability, for many of them are about what is fated to happen, especially at and after Ragnarøk (see the questions in stanzas 15, 17, 44, 46, 48, 50, 52, and the reply in stanza 39). Everyone in the poet's original audience must have known the myth that Óðinn will be swallowed by the wolf Fenrir at Ragnarøk, and the scene is a common subject of picture-stones;³⁰ at last *Vafþrúðnir* himself reveals it too (stanza 53). But if Óðinn is fated to die at Ragnarøk, he cannot die as a result of the contest with *Vafþrúðnir*; therefore he must be fated to win this contest, and he is in no real danger. Furthermore, the wise Frigg ought to realise this from the outset; in *Lokasenna* 29 she is said to know the whole of Fate, and while one poet is not bound by the statements of another (even if *Lokasenna* were not, as it probably is, later than *Vafþrúðnismál*),³¹ it still seems odd to portray her as ignorant of something which is absolutely basic to the mythological knowledge of the audience.

Yet it is not only Frigg's knowledge that the poet seems to defy, but even that of the audience itself. He who asks a question in this kind of contest must know the answer to that question; if that were not so, Óðinn's last question, to which only he can know the answer, would not reveal who he is. It follows that the questioner reveals something of himself in the questions he is able to ask. The most serious part of this contest (after *Vafþrúðnir* has insisted on the head-wagering) consists only of questions posed by Óðinn to the giant. Therefore a victory for *Vafþrúðnir* could not consist in asking a question that Óðinn is unable to answer. He would, however, win if he unmasked the true identity of his visitor: Óðinn would be alone in the hall of a strong and implacable enemy who shows no respect for the sanctity of a guest (since he threatens it as soon as Óðinn enters, 7,4–6), and could expect no mercy.

Three of Óðinn's questions seem to step outside the expected mythological subject matter. Two of them ask about the giant's own experience: 'what is the first thing you remember?' (st. 34) and 'how do you know what you know?' (st. 42). A third deviates from the usual pattern in by asking a riddle rather than a mythological question:

‘hveriar ro þær meyar,
er líða mar yfir,
fródgeðiaðar fara?’ (st. 48,4–6)

‘who are the maidens who pass over
the sea, wise ones travelling?’

When Óðinn asks the *völva* a similar question in *Baldrs draumar* 12,5–8, she immediately recognises him as Óðinn and refuses to answer anything more.

‘Gestumblindi’ asks *Heiðrekr* three very similar riddles, all of which have the answer ‘the waves’,³² and it may have been seen as an Odinic characteristic to ask riddles. But *Vafþrúðnir* fails to consider who might ask such questions. Whether we put this down to his stupidity or to the fact that he is fated to lose his life in this contest and cannot be allowed to recognise the clues that Óðinn gives him, these moments raise suspense and give us the sense that the god has given the giant every chance (if Fate allowed him any chance at all).

As the contest reaches its climax, therefore, the suspense is heightened: will Óðinn put the unanswerable question before the giant realises who his questioner is? And that last question does not come out of the blue. The first hint of who *Gagnráðr* might be comes with the eleventh of the twelve questions in Section C, with its allusion to Óðinn’s warriors (40–41), but there is a much larger one in the next question. *Vafþrúðnir* reveals (stanza 43) that his knowledge comes from the dead in the nine worlds below *Niflhel*: it would seem that his questioner knows this, and knows what *Vafþrúðnir* knows. Few can share the knowledge which Óðinn has pursued among the dead by his sacrifice of himself on *Yggdrasil* (see essay 5 above), so once again, *Vafþrúðnir* might at this moment have grasped the identity of his opponent. The first three questions of Section D reveal that the questioner is also one who knows some of the fated details of a world after *Ragnarøk* (stanzas 44, 46, 48); the fourth shows that he is interested in which of the *Æsir* will survive (stanza 50), and the fifth that he knows the fate of Óðinn himself (stanza 52). No broader hint of his identity could be given, but still the giant does not realise it (or perhaps, as in *Heiðreks saga*, cannot be sure of it). It is his last chance before the unanswerable question to which only Óðinn can know the answer. But the audience can appreciate the hints *Vafþrúðnir* has been given, and we can feel the suspense that comes from a sense that the giant had a real and fair chance of winning the deadly contest despite the fact that we know fate as well as Óðinn does himself.

Are we therefore colluding in our own deception? It is true that an audience can sometimes be persuaded to do this, as for example in the first two acts of Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar*, where the soothsayer’s warning ‘Beware the Ides of March’ (Act I, scene 2, lines 18, 22) combines with our historical knowledge to tell us that Caesar’s death is inevitable; and yet suspense is maintained by repeated warnings and suggestions that he may not go to the Capitol, where his murderers await him. We know how Caesar was killed in historical fact, and that he must be murdered in the play, and yet are repeatedly persuaded to contemplate the possibility that he may escape his fate.

But the case in *Vafþrúðnismál* is not quite like this, for if Fate is certain and Óðinn knows it, there is no point in his journey. Óðinn is a constant searcher after wisdom, and many of the myths associated with him are motivated by this.³³

This wisdom is not to be had free of charge, for the expedition usually involves pain, bodily loss, personal danger or the need for shameful behaviour; nor is it motiveless, for it is usually directed either towards the fruitless search for a way of avoiding Ragnarøk, or to the more rewarding quest for a consolation after it.

The same is probably true here. Óðinn should be seen, not as trying to discover what Fate holds in store – for if he did not know that already he would be unable to ask the questions – but as testing whether Fate is as immutable as it seems. This leads to an intriguing irony: so long as Vafþrúðnir's answers are what Óðinn expects, he is safe from losing his life in this contest, but on the other hand has no hope of avoiding the fate decreed for him at Ragnarøk. If the giant ever gave an answer which was unexpected, the inevitability of Óðinn's supposed fate would be cancelled; that would give hope of escaping Fenrir, but would simultaneously remove his security in the immediate contest with Vafþrúðnir. To this extent, the risk and the suspense are real.

In the end, of course, the poet reasserts the primacy of Fate. This may have been done because early audiences of the poem expected or preferred it, but it also deepens the literary appeal of the poem. This is no naive victory of god over demon, but a mutual tragedy, in which Óðinn's triumph over Vafþrúðnir and the latter's death serve only to show that the victor is as much trapped and doomed as his victim. And to the Óðinn of this poem, the survival of a continuing world after Ragnarøk is no ultimate consolation, for the last and most important issue on which he is seeking confirmation concerns his own death:

‘hvat verður Óðni at aldragi
þá er riúfaz regin?’ (52,4–6)

‘What will be the death of Óðinn
when the gods are destroyed?’

He uses the basic name Óðinn, although something like a hundred others were available, besides many other poetic evasions; the question could not be put more baldly or with more urgency, at least in verse. And once it is answered, he ends the contest immediately.

IV. The Ideology of *Vafþrúðnismál*

Sonr er betri, þótt sé síð of alinn,
eptir genginn guma;
sialdan bautarsteinar standa brauto nær
nema reisi niðr at nið.

It's best to have a son, though he may be born late,
to a man after he is gone;

memorial stones rarely stand near the road
 unless kin raise them for kindred.

(*Hávamál* 72)

It appears that in this poem Óðinn is more immediately concerned about his own fate than for the survival of the world after his death (unless we take it that he is seeking to place himself in danger in the hope of discovering a means of escape from Ragnarøk for the other gods – but such altruism is not usually characteristic of Óðinn). That may reflect a view that the concern of any individual for himself is more pressing than any family or social feelings he may have. Nonetheless, some members of his dynasty will survive after him, and the nature of this survival is extremely interesting, since there is no unanimity among the surviving sources about the world, if any, that will arise after Ragnarøk. This seems to be an example of the poet being free to create his own myth of the re-born world.

One element of this in *Vafþrúðnismál* seems to emerge by accident, and to have no connection with the rest. In reply to the tenth question in Section C, ‘Where did Njǫrðr come from?’ Vafþrúðnir says that the wise powers (*regin*) made him in the world of the Vanir and he was given as a hostage to the gods, but then adds:

‘Í aldar rǫc hann mun aptr koma
 heim með vísam vǫnum.’ (39,4–6)

‘at the fall of time he will return
 home among the wise Vanir.’

Machan (2008), 93 takes this simply to mean that fertility, represented by Njǫrðr, will depart from the world. But Freyr is perhaps a more obvious representative of fertility than Njǫrðr, and he dies at Ragnarøk, struck down by the fire-demon Surtr. Njǫrðr is more often connected with the sea, besides being the oldest of the Vanir hostages; and what this stanza seems actually to say is that he and the Vanir (other than Freyr) will not be involved in the fall of the Æsir. Perhaps some people held the view that the Vanir had existed before the coming of the Æsir and would still exist after they had gone. But this belief seems to be something casually picked up by this poet and used in the middle of his work, not connected with the climax towards which he is moving. It is interesting as yet another post-Ragnarøk myth, evidence of a great diversity of belief at this point, but not part of what this poet really wants to say.

The other survivors after Ragnarøk all form a coherent sequence in Section D. They are:

- 1) The daughter of Álfroðull ('Elf-glory', the sun), whom she will bear before the wolf Fenrir catches and swallows her (47). This seems to represent merely the renewal and continuation of the natural world.
- 2) Líf and Lífþrasir, the two human beings who will survive the great winter (Fimbulvetr), and must also be assumed to survive Ragnarøk, since subsequent generations are born from them (45). Líf (feminine) is obviously 'Life'; the meaning of Lífþrasir (masculine) has been disputed, but is most likely 'Impetuousness (or perhaps 'Forcefulness') of Life' (cf. *þrasa*, 'to rush').³⁴ Neither is known from any other mythological source except Snorri's *Gylfaginning* ch. 53, where they are obviously derived from here and this stanza is quoted. It seems probable that the poet of *Vafþrúðnismál* invented them.
- 3) The Æsir who survive fall into two categories: the first consists of two of the sons of Óðinn: Víðarr and Váli (51,1–3). They are both involved in other well-known myths: it is Víðarr who avenges the death of his father Óðinn by killing the wolf Fenrir. According to *Vafþrúðnismál* itself (53,3–6), he will do this by tearing the wolf's jaws apart, a scene which may also be depicted on the Gosforth Cross, Cumbria, England;³⁵ *Völuspá* 55 more decorously says that he will stab the wolf to the heart with his sword. Váli is the son of Óðinn who was born specifically to avenge his brother Baldr by killing Høðr and binding Loki (cf. *Völuspá* 32–35). Neither of these myths can have been invented by the *Vafþrúðnismál* poet, nor is it explained here how they come to survive Ragnarøk, but it is interesting that the selected survivors include these two paradigms of the just avenger, neither of whom has any other role in the myths that have come down to us.
- 4) The other surviving Æsir are Móði and Magni, the two sons of Þórr, whose names mean 'Courage' and 'Strength' (51,4–6); they will *vinna at vígþróti*, which might be translated either 'fight at the end of the battle' (i.e. successfully bring the conflict at Ragnarøk to an end), or 'work after the end of the battle' (i.e. rebuild the world after Ragnarøk is over). Móði and Magni are known to other poets, who define Þórr as father of one or other of them (see e.g. *Hymiskviða* 34, *Hárbarðsljóð* 9, 53), but the only other role known for either of them is in the story of how the three-year-old Magni, son of Þórr and the hag Járnsaxa, released Þórr when he was trapped under the leg of the fallen giant Hrungnir.³⁶ The meanings of their names seem unavoidably part of the poet's message: it is courage and strength that will survive.

The ideology of this poet's view of survival after Ragnarøk seems simple and clear-cut: it is an amoral matter (as, indeed, most Norse heathenism seems

to have had rather little to do with ethics), and the things which will ensure survival are nature, the stubborn will to live in human beings, and on the highest level courage, strength and the taking of just revenge for one's close relatives. Even these qualities, as Óðinn bitterly discovers, will not ensure one's own personal survival, but only that of one's family; and that is an inadequate consolation in the face of one's own inevitable death.

NOTES

- 1 N-K, 45–55; ed. Machan (2008) – on dating, see pp. 6–9.
- 2 Dörner (1999), 70.
- 3 See e.g. Sigvatr, *Erfidrápa Óláfs helga* 7,4 and 24,1 (*Skj.* I B, 240, 244; Kock I, 124, 126).
- 4 Fidjestøl (1999), 218–28; further on this dating test, see essay 3 above.
- 5 See e.g. Sigurður Nordal (1970–71), 104: 'The poem (i.e. *Vafþrúðnismál*) is a jumble of odd fragments of erudition without any proper organisation, and no attempt is made to trace the causal connection of events'. Einar Ól. Sveinsson (1962), 274–76 finds much to admire in the poem's metre, diction and preservation of ancient tradition, but thinks it lacks poetic inspiration and leaves incompatible myths unresolved.
- 6 See ed. Machan (2008), 76–77. An alternative translation of the name might be 'he whose plans are successful'.
- 7 Half of st. 27 has apparently been lost, but the surviving half makes up a complete statement and the lost material (if there was any) cannot be reliably reconstructed, see S-G III,I, 170; Machan (2008), 86.
- 8 On the notoriously difficult *lúðr* (*Vafþrúðnismál* 35,6) see S-G III,I, 172; Machan (2008), 89–90.
- 9 St. 38 has two extra half-lines, but there is no reason to reject them as spurious: extra half-lines essential to the sense are also found in half-stanzas of variant *galdratalag* in stt. 42, 43, where they may have the poetic function of emphasising a particularly significant question and answer (see below, and further on the poetic use of metrical variation, see essay 3 above). St. 39 also states that Njörðr was *made* in Vanaheimr ('The World of the Vanir') by *vís regin* ('wise powers'), and Óðinn uses the same word when he says in 3R that he has 'tested the powers'. This seems to imply belief in some other, more primary creative forces who are neither Vanir nor Æsir, but whether these are the Norns (i.e. the Fates) or some other divine force never becomes clear in *Vafþrúðnismál*.
- 10 Hallvard Lie (1992) suggests that 43,7: *hinig deyia ór helio halir* should be emended to *hinig deyia óhelgir halir* 'to that place die unhallowed men', and

that the nine worlds below Hel are reserved for the wicked, who go straight there rather than dying into them out of Hel. This seems unconvincing: as Lie points out himself, *halir* is usually a rather complimentary word for men, which one would not expect to find applied to the wicked, and apart from *Völuspá* it is hard to find any Old Norse mythological source in which the wicked are punished after death. The manuscript reading makes good sense, and Lie's view seems designed merely to bring the poem into agreement with views of the hereafter derived from *Völuspá* and the nine circles of Dante's *Inferno*.

- 11 Machan (1988), 89–90 translates st. 49: 'Three of the race of maidens will come over the settlements of Mǫgþrasir; only guardian spirits will be in their region (i.e. in the reborn world), although they (the maidens) are brought up among the giants'. Gade (1991) translates: 'Three of the maidens of Mǫgþrasir (giantesses) will come over the settlements of mankind; the only guardian spirits of those who are in the world, although they are born among the giants'. Machan (2008), 103 accepts Gade's rendering of the first half of the stanza as an alternative possibility. But the syntax is difficult in either interpretation, and Gade's translation produces a second half-stanza with no main verb. As Mǫgþrasir is otherwise unknown, the problem of whether he is a giant (as Gade thinks) or identical with or related to the human Lífþrasir (so Boer and others) is not soluble, though the similar formation of the names may suggest the latter. See also S-G III, I, 177. Whatever the meaning of Vafþrúðnir's reply to this question, he may be overlooking a much simpler 'riddle' answer to it – see below, and Ruggerini in McKinnell and Ruggerini (1994), 184–87.
- 12 See Ruggerini in McKinnell and Ruggerini (1994), 145–53 and 166–69.
- 13 See Ruggerini in McKinnell and Ruggerini (1994), 169–76.
- 14 For justification of this translation, see Ruggerini in McKinnell and Ruggerini (1994), 162–65.
- 15 cf. *Fáfnismál* 1–4, where Sigurðr unsuccessfully tries to conceal his name from the dying Fáfnir because, as the prose editor explains: *þat var trúa þeira í fornescio, at orð feigs mannz mætti mikit, ef hann bǫlvaði óvin sínom með nafni* – 'it was believed in ancient times that a dying man's word was of great power, if he cursed his enemy by name'. The same belief may be reflected in those runestones on which the betrayer or murderer of the commemorated man is named, e.g. the eleventh-century Söderby stone, Uppland, Sweden (U954), on which a man named Sassurr is accused of betraying his comrade (ed. Wessén and Jansson [1940–58], IV, 73–76). Another fascinating example is Stavanger stone III, Rogaland, S. Norway (carved during the winter of 1028–29), which seems to accuse St. Óláfr Haraldsson of the treacherous murder of the carver's patron, Erlingr Skjálgsson (*NIYR* IV, 245–58); cf. Snorri's description of this event in *Óláfs saga helga* ch. 176 (ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson [1941–51], II [ÍF 27], 313–19; trans.

- Laing [1930], 329–32) and the contemporary *flokkr* by Sigvatr deploring it (*Skj.* II B, 228–231; Kock I, 118–20).
- 16 See Handel (1965), Preface and p. 2. On the Rev. Thomas Morell (1703–84), see also Young (1949), 150.
- 17 Tolkien (1954), I, Prologue, ch. 4 (pp. 21–22).
- 18 See ed. and trans. C. Tolkien (1960), 32–44, 80–82.
- 19 C. Tolkien, ed. (1960), 32 footnote 1 explains it as a corruption of *Gestr inn blindi*, ‘The Blind Stranger’, and points out that Óðinn appears to St. Óláfr under the name Gestr in *Flateyjarbók* (ed. Guðbrandur Vígfússon and Unger [1860–68], II, 134–35; ed. Sigurður Nordal et al. [1944–45], II, 218–19).
- 20 Ed. Tolkien (1960), 44.
- 21 It may be no coincidence that Geirrøðr is also the name of an enemy of the gods in *Pórsdrápa*; the name seems to have been widely known as that of Þórr’s giant opponent, but it cannot be assumed (though it is possible) that the deviser of the *Grímnismál* story derived it from that source.
- 22 Child I, see Child V, 283–84; Edmunds (1985), 17–26, 282–91.
- 23 *DGF* 18 (I, 235–50); Kristensen (1889), 2; cf. also the plot of *Mary of Nemmegen* (1993), 18–20.
- 24 ed. Tolkien (1960), 43.
- 25 As the penultimate question in the riddle contest in *Heiðreks saga* is also about Óðinn (‘What two beings have ten feet, three eyes and one tail?’ – answer ‘Óðinn riding on Sleipnir’), it is possible that such a ‘hint’ question may also have been a common part of the inherited pattern; see Ruggerini in McKinnell and Ruggerini (1994), 177. In the Faroese ballad *Gátu Ríma* (Hammershaimb, *Færoiske Kvæðer* II, trans. Kershaw (1921), 213–16), the ‘hint’ question from *Heiðreks saga* becomes the final question that the king cannot answer.
- 26 Sverdllov (2011), 64–69 advocates a more aggressive translation of these lines: ‘I have contrived to destroy many, I have tortured many, I have put to life-threatening tests many a god’, and argues that they are a magic spell in poetic form which enables Óðinn to overcome Vafþrúðnir even though his last question is a form of cheating. Whether one accepts this interpretation or not, it seems very likely that the refrain has a magical force in st. 54; if so, one might extend the argument to suggest that in st. 3 it enables Óðinn to overcome Frigg’s objection to his journey, and that elsewhere in Section D it prevents Vafþrúðnir from understanding Óðinn’s increasingly broad hints of his true identity.
- 27 The word *kaldriffaðan* (literally ‘cold-ribbed’) is not found elsewhere; for the interpretation ‘cunning’ or ‘hostile’, see *Vafþrúðnismál*, ed. Machan (2008), 78–79, and Sprenger (1985). S-G III,i 164 link it to uses of *kaldr* with the meaning ‘bringing ill fortune’, e.g. *Lokasenna* 51,6, *Völundarkviða* 31,6, *Atlakviða* 2,6.
- 28 Dörner (1999), 73 suggests that in this answer Vafþrúðnir is trying to impose a

nihilistic view of life (that it ends in cold and utter darkness), that this answer is misleading, and that Óðinn offers a kind of ‘salvation’ by forcing the giant to concede in his next two answers that mankind and the sun will live on (see stt. 45, 47). But there is no contradiction between *Vafþrúðnir*’s replies – human beings may come to Niflhel even if other humans live on after them – and it is a basic condition of esoteric mythological verse that the all-wise speakers who deliver its didactic material must be assumed always to speak the literal truth.

- 29 Lindqvist (1941–42), I, fig. 81; II, 86–87 and fig. 429.
- 30 See Turville-Petre (1964), 60 and illustrations 29, 38; another probable example appears on the Skipwith Stone, North Yorkshire, England – see Bailey (1980), plate 38.
- 31 See essay 7; Söderberg is generally very sceptical about direct borrowings between eddic poems, but accepts (73–76) that *Lokasenna* is indebted to *Hávamál* and *Vafþrúðnismál*.
- 32 Ed. Tolkien (1960), 40–42.
- 33 See e.g. his hanging on the world tree (*Hávamál* 138–41); his pledging his eye in the well of Mímir (*Völuspá* 27); his theft of the mead of poetry (*Hávamál* 104–09); his living as a witch in order to learn the female magic known as *seiðr* (*Lokasenna* 24); his raising up of prophetesses, forcing them to prophesy for him (*Völuspá* and *Baldrs draumar*).
- 34 Machan (2008), 99 translates as ‘Persistent Life’ or ‘Raging or Impetuous Life’ (and so also *LP* p. 376); Gade (371) as ‘the one who desires offspring’; SG III,i, 175 as ‘der durch seine lebenskraft sich erhaltende’ (‘the one who preserves himself through his life-force’). Gade’s translation seems to me to read in more than the meaning elements imply, but all the others contain the idea of survival through endurance.
- 35 See also Bailey (1980), 126–28.
- 36 *Skáldskaparmál* ch. 17, ed. Faulkes (1998), I, 22.

7 Motivation and Meaning in *Lokasenna*¹

The main question I wish to pose in this paper is a very simple one: what is the reason for the argument in *Lokasenna*? Most verbal contests in eddic poetry are not motiveless, but have some practical intention and result. In *Vafþrúðnismál* the loser of the wisdom contest will lose his life; in *Alvíssmál* the dwarf wants a wife and Þórr wants to keep him talking until the sun turns him to stone; in *Hárbarðsljóð*, Þórr wants to be ferried across a fjord and Óðinn wants to assert his own intellectual superiority; in *Skírnismál*, Skírnir wants to gain Gerðr's love for Freyr, which she is reluctant to give. Outside the Codex Regius of the Poetic Edda, the deadly riddle contest reappears in the verse of *Hervarar saga* ch. 10 (ed. Tolkien [1956], 36–51; ed. and trans. Tolkien [1960], 32–44) and the Þórr-Óðinn contest in *Gautreks saga* ch. 7 (*FSN* III, 25–26), though in this instance the underlying verse has not survived. In each case, the argument has some practical cause and the upshot is some real change in the circumstances of those involved. It would therefore be surprising if there were no practical motivation for Loki's intrusion into Ægir's feast other than the uttering of comic abuse. Loki cannot be killed in this contest, because we know his future up to Ragnarøk (and if we didn't, st. 49 reminds us of it); so we must find some functional explanation of why Loki chooses to intrude where he is so clearly not wanted.

I. Are Loki's Accusations True?

My second question, which can be answered at once, is whether the accusations which Loki hurls at the gods should be regarded as true (as argued for example by Turville-Petre, [1964], 131) or as a light-hearted mixture of truth, half-truth and comically outrageous lies (as suggested by Einar Ólafur Sveinsson [1962], 320–21, Anne Holtsmark [1965], 678–80, and Dronke II, 350–55).

If some of Loki's accusations were false, the force of his attack would be greatly reduced, quite apart from the danger of confusion between the supposedly true and false accusations. Besides, a god who was falsely accused could simply retort that Loki is lying – yet only one of them does so (Bragi in st. 14). The accusation he is reacting against is a general one of cowardice, something that would normally be hard to establish one way or the other. But in this context, Bragi is using the excuse that they are in Ægir's hall to avoid fighting Loki, while asserting in ferocious terms what he would do to him if he were outside. In the next stanza, Loki coolly calls his bluff and quite accurately says that Bragi won't do what he has threatened. Bragi's hot denial is therefore part of a demonstration that the accusation is well-founded.

Freyja also tries to suggest that Loki's accusation is false, when she asserts that he has a deceitful tongue (st. 31, 1, possibly echoing and implying the threat in *Hávamál* 29,4–6 against those who are too talkative). Again, the charge she is replying to is general rather than relating to one specific incident; it is that each of the Æsir and elves present has been her lover. Of course this accusation is also true in general substance; Freyja is a goddess of sexuality, and her promiscuity is only to be expected. To take one instance of it, *Sqrla þáttur* opens with two chapters in which she sleeps with each of four dwarf smiths and is then visited while asleep in her private bower by a provocative fly whom we know to be Loki in one of his many forms (*FSN* I, 197–99). It seems, therefore, that the poet only allows his characters to deny Loki's accusations when there is no danger of our believing them.

A number of gods, on the other hand, overtly or implicitly admit that Loki's accusations are well-founded. The clearest examples are in st. 33, where Njörðr admits Freyja's promiscuity; st. 35, where he admits having been a hostage; and st. 39, where Týr admits the loss of his hand. Another repeated tactic is for the deity accused to repeat the accusation with the preface *Veiztu ef...* 'You know if ...', followed by a counter-accusation. As Heinrichs (1970) notes, this is a really primitive tactic of argument (p. 53), popular though it remains with modern politicians. It is used by Óðinn in st. 23, Frigg in st. 27 and Skaði in st. 51; but the point is that it amounts to an admission that the accusation is true.

One ought, however, to consider for a moment what we mean by saying that an accusation is 'true'. It certainly does not mean that Loki is being fair – he can put his own hostile interpretations on the actions of the gods, and sometimes they are not the obvious interpretations. But the accusation must be based on some existing tradition, or at least it must be in character with some existing tradition of what the accused deity is like. This may explain why some accusations do not seem at first sight to be very serious. That against Heimdallr (st. 48), which rails against his position as watchman of the gods, is an example; if

Loki were free to make up lies, he would surely have alleged something more serious against his most deadly enemy.²

There is, though, one other test that must be applied. If we are meant to regard Loki's accusations as accurate (if sometimes biased), there must not be any which are in clear contradiction with all other tradition. One of Loki's statements (but only one) does seem to run counter to what we learn elsewhere; this is his assertion in st. 58 that Þórr will not dare to rage as he is doing now when he must fight the wolf at Ragnarøk. Everybody knows that a schematic view of Ragnarøk makes Víðarr kill the Wolf after the latter has swallowed Óðinn, while it matches Þórr against the World Serpent,³ so it looks as if Loki has made a mistake. Magnus Olsen (1960), II, 51–52 suggests that the author is influenced by a *lausavísa* by Hildir Hrólfsdóttir about Gǫngu-Hrólf (Skj. I B, 27; Kock I, 17) and thinking of the proverb *illt's við úlf at ylfask*, 'it's bad to rage (literally "make a wolf of oneself") against a wolf'; but that is no solution, since it supplies no literal interpretation of what Loki means. There is no getting away from the clear literal meaning of what he says.

There are, I think, three possible ways of answering this problem. One is to regard this as a mistake on Loki's part, inserted by the author to show that he is less successful in abusing Þórr than he has been against the other gods. But in this case it seems odd that the mistake occurs at the beginning of the confrontation with Þórr and is followed by some shrewd hits about Þórr's encounter with Skrímir (stanzas 60, 62).

Another possible explanation is that traditions about Ragnarøk were not unanimous, but included one in which Þórr did fight the Wolf. In *Hymiskviða* 11 he is called *Hróðrs andskoti*, 'Hróðr's opponent', which may imply this. Klingenberg (1983), 143, 161 suggests that Þórr and Fenrir are, in both *Hymiskviða* and *Lokasenna*, apocalyptically symbolic of the opposing sides at Ragnarøk as a whole, but I find this symbolic mode of thinking unconvincing for this usually literal and specific poem. The traditions behind *Hymiskviða* are peculiar in a number of ways, but the considerable confusion in the text of *Völuspá* 55–56, which the *Lokasenna* poet may have been using here, also suggests variable traditions. It would be easy to conclude from the *Hauksbók* text of *Völuspá* 55,5–8 that Þórr will fight against the Wolf:

Mun Oðins sonr eitri mæta,
vargs at dauða Víðars niðia.

Óðinn's son will meet the venom of
the monster [or wolf] after the death
of Víðarr's kinsman.

(For the emendation *eitri* for MS *ormi*, see *Völuspá*, ed. Sigurður Nordal [1984], 106.) But as this stanza also mentions Víðarr, who exists in myth only

as the slayer of the Wolf, a reader who misunderstood it in this way would also have to conclude that Þórr will be unable to kill Fenrir. Such a belief could easily produce both the *heiti* in *Hymiskviða* 11 and the allegation in *Lokasenna* 58. A different confusion of the same two mythical motifs may perhaps appear on the Gosforth Cross, where a Víðarr-like figure can be seen forcing the jaws of a monster apart with a spear, but the monster seems to be a serpent rather than a wolf.⁴

A third possibility, and perhaps the most probable one, is that Loki's accusation is not false but merely unfair. It was the duty of any son to avenge his father, but it is Víðarr, not Þórr, who will exact vengeance from Fenrir for the killing of Óðinn, and Loki may be suggesting that Þórr will avoid this duty out of cowardice. This last explanation has the virtue of not conflicting with known tradition, but is also more obviously and completely unjust than any of Loki's other allegations, and might run the risk of undermining the force of what he says, if it were not followed up by more substantial accusations against Þórr's courage, strength and good faith (see stt. 60, 62, 64).

The second and third of these explanations are both possible, and it cannot therefore be shown that Loki's accusations run clearly counter to existing traditions at any point. Many of the gods he attacks effectively admit the truth of what he says, and the two who accuse him of falsehood are themselves demonstrably lying. It looks as if we are meant to take it that the accusations are basically true throughout, although they may be couched in a biased form.

II. Intimations of Ragnarøk

Two other points call for attention. The poem contains a number of allusions to what will happen at Ragnarøk: in st. 10 Óðinn tells Víðarr to offer his seat to the 'Wolf's father', and this is a covert allusion to the struggle between Víðarr and Fenrir at Ragnarøk; in st. 39 Týr mentions the bound Wolf awaiting Ragnarøk; in st. 41 Freyr refers to the downfall of the gods – the Wolf is bound *unz riúfaz regin*, 'until the gods are destroyed'; in st. 42 Loki notes that Freyr will feel the loss of his sword at Ragnarøk; in st. 58 Loki mentions Þórr's alleged fight with the Wolf at Ragnarøk. The persistence of these references seems to justify Klingenberg's view (Klingenberg [1983], 152–53) that the end of the world is the overriding idea of *Lokasenna*, though I disagree with his view of Loki's motivation (see below).

Secondly, there are two occasions when goddesses are defended, apparently irrelevantly, with the statement that they understand Fate. Óðinn says this of Gefjón in st. 21:

‘Ærr ertu, Loki, oc ørviti,
 er þú fær þér Gefjon at gremi,
 þvíat aldar ørlög hygg ec at hon qll
 um viti
 iafngorla sem ec.’

‘You are mad, Loki, and out of your
 wits,
 when you set out to vex Gefjon,
 for I think she knows the whole fate of
 the world
 as clearly as I.’

– and Freyja makes a similar defence of Frigg in st. 29. Magnus Olsen explains this as an implied threat: it is dangerous to anger a goddess who knows Fate.⁵ But this hardly makes sense; if Fate is Fate, then it cannot be fundamentally changed either by a malignant goddess or by a favourable one. One could argue that those who know Fate can act in a way that will either hasten or delay it, but in fact, many of Loki’s female opponents seem anxious to avoid open confrontation (e.g. Iðunn, Gefjon, Sif). So if the allusion to a goddess knowing Fate is a threat, it is one which the gods are apparently reluctant to put into actual effect.

I shall now return to my first question: what is the reason for the argument? In st. 21 Óðinn says that Loki is mad to try to annoy Gefjon because she understands the whole fate of the world as clearly as Óðinn does himself. That implies that Loki’s motive for trying to annoy Gefjon (and hence the other deities as well) should be understood in terms of Fate. I would suggest that he is motivated by the desire to hurry Fate along by provoking a final breach between himself and the gods. Such a breach must happen before the gods bind him, and that must take place before Ragnarøk can follow, and with it the destruction of the gods. It is thus within the power of the gods to delay Ragnarøk unless Loki can provoke them into a final breach with him. Loki himself certainly knows what the future holds; we see this from stanzas 42, 58, 62. He even knows about his own binding, which he admits in st. 50, using the same phrase, *Veiztu, ef ...* as his opponents do when they admit the substantial truth of an accusation. This foreknowledge seems to me to render unlikely Klingenberg’s suggestion (Klingenberg [1983], 152) that Loki is trying to discover what punishment lies in store for him as a result of the murder of Baldr. His task of provoking the gods is made more difficult by the fact that many of them also know why he is there. Those who know what is to come, and who presumably realise what he is doing, include those who refer to or are said to possess knowledge of Fate (Gefjon, Óðinn, Frigg and Freyja), and those who refer to what will happen at or before Ragnarøk (Týr, Freyr and Skaði). There are five characters of whom we never discover whether they know Fate or not (Iðunn, Njörðr, Heimdallr, Sif and Beyla), though the tactics adopted may suggest that at least Iðunn and Heimdallr know what is to come, while Beyla probably does

not. A few of the gods are either ignorant of Fate or allow themselves to forget about it in the anger of the moment, since they make bombastic claims about the future which are in direct conflict with Fate. Bragi is the first of these – if he knows Fate, his announcement that he would carry Loki’s head in his hand if he were outside (st. 14) becomes pointless, since Loki is not destined to die in that way – and one who announces that the Æsir will never offer Loki a seat (st. 8) just before Óðinn does exactly that (st. 10) is clearly no great expert at telling the future. Byggvir seems to think (st. 43) that it is within Freyr’s power to grind Loki into tiny pieces, and his miniature bellicosity is simply ridiculous. It is possible that we should add Beyla to this list, depending on what is meant when she says (st. 55) that Þórr will bring them peace from Loki. If she means that Þórr will kill Loki or awe him into silence, she is clearly ignorant of the fated future. If she means he will drive Loki out, she is right, but does not understand Loki’s strategy (if I have identified it rightly). But these are the most minor deities present, the ones we might expect to be ignorant. The only surprising addition to their number is Þórr, whose repeated threats to destroy Loki with his hammer (stanzas 57, 59, 61, 63) are in blatant conflict with Loki’s role in Fate. I shall return to this point when looking at the conclusion of the poem.

This explanation gives a reason for Loki’s intrusion into the hall, for the references to Fate and to Ragnarøk, and for the fact that many of the gods are reluctant to behave towards Loki with the hostility they actually feel against him (which Eldir has underlined for us in st. 2, before Loki ever enters the hall).⁶ I shall now offer a reading of the poem in the light of this interpretation, looking at the kinds of accusation Loki makes and the motives which bring individual gods into the argument.

III. Individual Motivations

On the level of the listening audience, there is an element of the guessing game about *Lokasenna*. Outside the hall, Loki identifies the person he is speaking to as Eldir (1,1), but is himself identified only as an abusive enemy of the gods until he enters the hall and names himself as Loptr (6,3). He is then defied by an unnamed speaker (st. 8), whom he ignores in order to remind Óðinn that they once swore an oath of foster-brotherhood (st. 9); it is not until he has been given the seat that his defier wanted to deny him that he contemptuously identifies that opponent as Bragi (11,4–6). Thereafter, each new speaker bursts in unannounced, and as with Bragi, we are implicitly invited to identify who the speaker is from what he or she says, before Loki names him or her in his reply

(Iðunn in 17,1, Gefjon in 20,1, Óðinn in 22,1, Frigg in 26,1, Freyja in 30,1, Niq̃rðr in 34,1, Týr in 38,1, Heimdallr in 48,1, Beyla in 56,1, Þórr in 58,1–3). By way of variation, Loki's retort sometimes gives mythological information about the new speaker without actually naming him or her (as with Freyr in st. 42, Skaði in stt. 50 and 52, Sif in st. 54); in one case, he gives information about a deity but pretends that he is so insignificant that he doesn't know who he is, so that Byggvir has to name himself (45,1). As each new speaker is introduced, therefore, we are invited to consider:

1. What is distinctive in what this speaker says?
2. Which of the gods might be expected to intervene at this point?
3. What motive drives the new speaker to intervene?⁷

When Loki enters the hall and demands a drink (st. 6) there is what looks like a deliberate echo of *Vafþrúðnismál* 8, where Óðinn does the same in the hall of the giant Vafþrúðnir:

Pyrstr ec kom þessar hallar til,
Loptr, um langan veg.
(*Lokasenna* 6,1–3)

Thirsty I came to this hall,
Loptr on the lengthy way.

Gagnráðr ec heiti; nú emc af gongo
kominn
þyrstr til pinna sala.
(*Vafþrúðnismál* 8:1–3)

I am called Gagnráðr; now I have
come from the path,
thirsty to your halls.

It creates an unsettling reversal for Loki, the ally of giants, to be the 'Óðinn' figure in the presence of the gods themselves, and at the same time introduces the theme of verbal contest and suggests that this time the gods may not be victorious.⁸

The first figure to respond turns out to be Bragi. Magnus Olsen suggests that he has the position of official court orator, and points out some interesting resemblances between him and Unferð, who holds the same position at King Hroðgar's court in *Beowulf*.⁹ If this is right, Bragi stands accused of professional incompetence before he even speaks, because Loki has had time (st. 7) to comment on the shocked silence with which his entry has been received. He has neither been offered a seat nor turned away, so the court *pulr* or orator has been slow in doing his job. As soon as he does open his mouth, we can add lack of discretion to Bragi's qualities, for his words are unnecessarily extreme: the Æsir will never offer Loki a seat (st. 8). Loki ignores him and reminds Óðinn how in the old days

the two of them became foster-brothers (st. 9); Óðinn must either order that Loki be given a place at the feast or else he must break his oath. He gives way, but in the most ironic manner possible, telling Víðarr to let the Wolf's father have a seat (st. 10). This answers Loki's appeal to ancient friendship with a reminder of future enmity: at Ragnarök Óðinn will be swallowed by the Wolf, who will in turn be killed by Víðarr. This reluctant invitation gives Loki the chance for an ironic toast in honour of the Æsir and Ásynjur, in the course of which he can identify Bragi and taunt him again (st. 11), and of course the latter does not know when to keep quiet. This time, however, he offers Loki a horse and a sword as an inducement to peace (st. 12) – another parallel with *Unferð* (see *Beowulf* 1455–71) – and it undermines both of them in the same way. To begin with defiance and then offer gifts conveys a suggestion of cowardice, which is what Loki promptly accuses him of (st. 13, probably echoing *Hávamál* 16).

He also mocks him by pretending to misunderstand the figurative legal phrase Bragi has used: *ok bætir þér sva baugi Bragi*, 'and thus Bragi will make a legal payment to you'. By pretending to regard this as a literal offer of a ring, he contrives to draw attention to Bragi's splendid appearance and suggest that he is himself like a piece of jewellery, a *bekkskrautuðr* (cf. 15,3) – nice to look at in the hall but of no practical use. Þórr's outraged reaction to the same phrase in *Hárbarðsljóð* 42–43 suggests that an obscene sense may also be present: Loki is pretending that Bragi meant to offer himself to Loki as a passive sexual partner. Bragi responds with ferocious bluster, which Loki promptly exposes: if Bragi wants to fight, no one is stopping him (15,4–6). Bragi is then further humiliated by needing the intervention of his wife to save him. He has been shown up as a coward and as incompetent in his special field of responsibility. Oratory is seen as mere bluster to protect the braggart.

Iðunn saves Bragi by pretending to scold him for lack of tact (st. 16). Her probable motive is to conceal his cowardice, but the effect is to emphasise it by making him look like a henpecked husband. Her ostensible argument seems to be that Loki must not be abused lest it undermine the position of those who are merely *óskmegir*, 'adoptive relatives' of the Æsir; this uses the oath of foster-brotherhood mentioned by Loki in st. 9 to suggest that he is not really one of the Æsir. Loki's insulting reply is overtly about Iðunn's lust (st. 17), but more relevantly, its real subject is lack of concern for proper family relationships, and this exposes Iðunn's hypocrisy. Being friendly to adoptive kinsmen is all very well, but making one's brother's killer into one of them by having sex with him is carrying it a bit too far. It is not known who Iðunn's *bróðurbani* was, but *Unferð* in *Beowulf* is also the slayer of his brothers (*Beowulf* 587),¹⁰ so it was probably Bragi himself; if it was anyone else, we must add cuckoldry to the insulting associations attached to him.

Íðunn's attempt in st. 18 to use soft words to turn away wrath is a mask. When she says she doesn't want Bragi and Loki to get enraged and fight, she is still trying to conceal Bragi's cowardice – actually, for all her elaborate anxiety, there is no danger of any such thing. Despite her concern for Bragi (possibly motivated by concern for her own social position as his wife), Íðunn thus stands accused of family treachery motivated by lust, and we have seen that she is also a hypocrite.

Gefjon is the next figure to take the stage. It is not at first clear why she intervenes, but her opening phrase neatly undermines Íðunn's elaborate argument. She calls Bragi and Loki *ip Æsir tveir*, 'you two Æsir' (19,1), despite the fact that Íðunn has just pretended that Loki is not really one of the Æsir. Magnus Olsen and Ruggerini take the second half of st. 19 to mean 'Loki does not know that Bragi is joking, and that everyone loves him (i.e. because of his playfulness)'.¹¹ If this is right, Gefjon contradicts Íðunn again, for if Bragi had really been joking (which of course he was not), there would be no possibility of the enraged fight Íðunn professed to fear; so Gefjon's defence of Bragi neatly contradicts Íðunn's. Söderberg (1985), 73–74 would translate either: 'It is not Loki's fault that Bragi is quarrelsome, so all the gods exonerate Loki' – a rather weak repetition of what Íðunn has just said – or: 'It does not worry Loki that Bragi is quarrelsome and that all the gods excuse him for being so', again contradicting Íðunn's professed fear of a fight.

Loki's reply again concerns sexuality, but this time it is about prostitution: he alleges that a certain *sveinn inn hvíti*, 'the pale lad', gave Gefjon a jewel, in return for which she laid her thigh over him (st. 20). This allegation cannot now be substantiated from any other source, and the poet may have made it up. If he did, it is in character, because the only other story that survives about Gefjon, that of her relationship with Gylfi (see Bragi's *Ragnarsdrapa* 13 and ch. 1 of *Gylfaginning*),¹² is also about prostitution, since it tells how she obtained Zealand from him in return for her sexual favours. If the poet made up this allegation it follows that he expected his audience to understand what he meant with no more information than we now have (unless a stanza in which Loki replied to Íðunn is lost between stanzas 18 and 19, which is possible, though such a stanza would probably have contained more abuse of Íðunn rather than information about Gefjon). For this reason, Magnus Olsen's suggestion that the *sveinn inn hvíti* is 'a made-up figure, perhaps a young smith' (Magnus Olsen [1960], I, 116) seems motiveless and feeble. *Hvíti* in this context is probably derogatory, implying cowardice or effeminacy (see Ruggerini [1979], 56), and in Bragi we have a splendid candidate to hand for that description – one, moreover, who has already been associated with jewellery (compare stanzas 13, 15). If this association is correct, Gefjon is intervening in defence of her

paramour, and we have the comic but unedifying spectacle of wife and mistress contradicting one another in a scramble to defend a worthless coward to whom they are both sexually attached in different but equally disgraceful ways.

Óðinn's intervention at this point is probably provoked by Loki's closing phrase about Gefjon:

‘oc þú lagðir lær yfir.’ (*Lokasenna* 20,6) ‘and you laid your thigh over (him).’

This looks like a coarse parody of his own seduction of Gunnlǫð, who according to *Hávamál* 108:

‘þeirar er lögðomc arm yfir.’ ‘who laid her arm over me.’
(*Hávamál* 108:6)

That story also involves prostitution, though this time by the male partner, since Óðinn sleeps with Gunnlǫð only in order to obtain the mead of poetry. It is an ‘unmanly’ thing to have done, and it introduces a theme of *ergi*, ‘unmanliness’, in Óðinn. He avoids this covert attack on himself, and pretends only to defend Gefjon (st. 21), by saying that she also knows Fate.

At first, the diversion appears to have been successful, and Loki leaves the theme of unmanliness to take up that of Fate (st. 22). Óðinn, as chooser of the slain in battle, is an agent of Fate, and Loki's charge against him is that he is systematically unjust in this specialist field of patronage. Because his purpose is to select the *einherjar* in preparation for the climax of Ragnarǫk (still unmentioned, though both of them have it in mind), he is of course likely to kill the most valiant and consequently to give victory to those who do not deserve it. *Opt* (22,4) should be taken as referring to what usually happens.

At the beginning of st. 23 Óðinn implicitly admits that this is true; but the implication of sexually unworthy behaviour still rankles, and he now makes the mistake of attacking Loki with the accusation of having changed sex, and furthermore, of having been a woman of low enough status to milk subterranean cows for eight years (st. 23). Meulengracht Sørensen suggests that this also implies Loki's subjection to the gross sexual tastes of giants, and this seems very probable.¹³ Such stories (and worse) about Loki are of course common, and do not worry him a bit; one remembers the indecent alacrity with which he volunteers in *Þrymskviða* 20 to go to Jǫtunheimar as Þórr's ‘maidservant’. But it gives Loki the chance to return to this theme, on which accusations matter more to Óðinn than they do to himself. Óðinn has been a woman too, and one of even lower status – not even a milkmaid, but a travelling witch, an outcast from decent society (st. 24). We must assume that this was not done for sexual enjoyment, but

rather to learn more magic, yet such magic was disreputable in itself, at least by the human standards employed in this poem.¹⁴ Óðinn is thus seen as systematically unjust in his own special field and capable of sinking to any disgraceful behaviour in order to obtain magical wisdom of a discreditable kind.

We need not see Frigg's intervention at this point as motivated purely by conjugal love for Óðinn. The status of a woman in Norse society depended to a large extent on her marriage, and in extreme cases the removal of manhood was enough to annul the social and political effects of a marriage; for example, Meulengracht Sørensen points out that in *Íslendinga saga* ch. 115, the motive for the partial castration of Orækja Snorrason was to cancel the political effect of his marriage to Arnþjórg Arnórsdóttir, and the effect was both to annul the marriage and to send Orækja into exile.¹⁵ Therefore the attack on Óðinn's manhood amounts to an attack on the social position of Frigg herself (a motive which may also explain Iðunn's concern to ward off the accusation of cowardice against Bragi). In st. 25, Frigg picks up the theme of Fate again and pretends that it refers only to the past, and that it has compelled both Loki and Óðinn into their past unmanly exploits. The effects of this dubious piece of reasoning are to make Óðinn and Loki into equals (she uses the same phrase, *íþ Ásir tveir* (25,4), as Gefjon has done about Loki and Bragi in 19,1), and to defend Loki against her own husband's attack on him.

She gets no thanks. Loki's response is to remind her that she too has an unsavoury past to hide, in her semi-incestuous adultery with her husband's two brothers, Vili and Vé,¹⁶ and there may also be a continuing suggestion of Óðinn's unmanliness. At all events, Loki points out that she is not quite the loyal wife she pretends to be (st. 26). Her response is the angry assertion that he would pay for that remark if she had a son like Baldr here (st. 27). This is a familiar female tactic, though one no self-respecting feminist would use; its purpose is to suggest that the man who has made the offending remark is a coward who would never dare to say such things to another man. But on this occasion it backfires. In the first half of st. 28, Loki portrays himself as provoked into saying more in order to defend himself: the reason why Baldr is not here is that Loki himself has already contrived his death. This adds a second injury: not only is Loki attacking Frigg's position as a wife, but he has also destroyed her position as a mother, and even the vengeance for that deed is carried out by a son of Óðinn who is not also Frigg's son (see *Baldrs draumar* 10–11).

It is possible that the reminder of Baldr's death and how Loki planned it may contain an even more hurtful implication. If the first audience of the poem knew the story in a form like the one in *Gylfaginning* ch. 49,¹⁷ they would know that the vital information Loki needed in order to contrive the killing of Baldr was given to him by Frigg herself. Unfortunately, the poem on which Snorri

apparently based this chapter is lost apart from the single stanza he quotes, so it is not certain that this detail was known before Snorri's time. If it was, as seems probable, it suggests that Frigg's self-indulgence has involved unwitting treachery to her son as well as semi-incestuous betrayal of her husband.

It is initially hard to see why Freyja interposes at this point to defend Frigg (st. 29). Heinrichs (1970), 54 suggests that she is shocked by the effrontery with which Loki casts his responsibility for the son's death in the face of the mother, but in view of the self-serving motives for so many of the other interventions, such a motivation seems improbably altruistic. If we accept that Snorri was probably following an older tradition in making Frigg betray to Loki the fact that Baldr could be killed by the *mistilteinn*, the question arises why she should be so casual in betraying such a vital secret to an unknown woman. Perhaps we should see Loki, like Óðinn on Sámsey in st. 24, as transformed into a travelling *spákona* or prophetess, and the conversation between Frigg and the disguised Loki as an exchange of magic, occult information. In that case, Baldr's death was partly caused by Frigg's love of *seiðr*, the evil art which according to *Ynglinga saga* ch. 4 was introduced to the Æsir by Freyja,¹⁸ so that she also has her conscience stung by mention of the death of Baldr. Freyja's resort to Frigg's knowledge of Fate would then carry two meanings, both 'Frigg (and I, Freyja) can see why you're trying to annoy her', and 'Frigg (and I, Freyja) are guiltless of the death of Baldr, because it was all due to Fate'. But this must remain uncertain, although it may receive support from st. 32 (see below).

Loki's attack on Freyja concentrates on her well-known promiscuity;¹⁹ he suggests that she has little right to defend Frigg, because she is herself even worse. Where Frigg has committed adultery with two men, to whom she is related by marriage only, Freyja has done so with every male character present. The end of st. 32 has usually been taken to assert that Freyja committed incest with her brother Freyr, and that the gods discovered this and mocked them by sewing them together;²⁰ but Söderberg (1985), 78 tentatively renders it: 'when for your brother's benefit you seduced the good gods with magic'. This is philologically persuasive, makes it unnecessary to suppose a lost myth, and if correct, makes explicit the guilty motive for Freyja's intervention.

Njörðr is now forced to intervene for the honour of the family of which he is the senior member. His defence of Freyja: 'it does little harm if a woman gets herself a husband, a lover or both' shows that Njörðr himself has sexual morals as lax as those of his daughter, and would certainly not have gained the approval either of the Æsir or of the poem's original audience. His counter-attack on Loki is simple and repetitive, answering one allegation of sexual perversion with another and repeating Óðinn's charge that Loki is *ragr* and has borne

children. It is a stupid attack, for there is no reason to think it will have any more effect now than when Óðinn used it, but it gives Loki the chance of an almost equally humiliating counter-charge against Njörðr himself. He alleges not only that Njörðr was sent ‘east from here’ to the gods as a hostage (i.e. east from Ægir’s hall, imagined as being somewhere far out in the north Atlantic), but also that Hymir’s daughters (i.e. giantesses) used him as a chamber-pot and pissed in his mouth. Magnus Olsen is probably right to interpret Hymir’s daughters as the Norwegian rivers, which discharge into the sea, of which Njörðr is patron.²¹

Njörðr’s defensive response is that he may have been sent as a hostage to the gods, but he is still a man rather than a woman, for he has begotten a heroic son in Freyr:

‘oc þiccir sa ása iaðarr.’ (35,6)

‘and he is thought to be the protector
of the Æsir.’

(It is interesting that one is constantly tempted, in discussing this poem, to refer to the gods as men and women. That is indeed how they are regarded in the argument, so it is, for example, no defence of Freyja to say that as a goddess of fertility she has to be promiscuous; here she is judged as if she were a promiscuous woman.) In the same way, Njörðr’s claim to be a moral defender of his two children is demolished when Loki reminds him that he is guilty of exactly the same form of incest himself (st. 36).

The argument has been turning into an escalating row between Loki and the Vanir, and at this point the one-handed Týr steps in, apparently in an attempt to reconcile or arbitrate. In view of the final sentence about Týr and Fenrir in *Gylfaginning* ch. 25, this has caused some surprise:

En þá er Æsir vildu eigi leysa hann
á beit hann hǫndina af þar er nú
heitir úlflíðr, ok er hann einhendr
ok ekki kallaðr sættir manna.

And when the Æsir refused to let him
[Fenrir] go, then he bit off the hand at
the place that is now called the ‘wolf
joint’ [wrist], and he is one-handed
and he is not considered a promoter
of settlements between people.²²

Critics have tended to agree with Loki when he retorts that Týr has never known how to *bera tilt með tveim* (38,3) – probably ‘to reconcile two parties in a dispute’, even if one may suspect a cruel pun here whereby Loki also means that Týr cannot ‘carry (anything) properly with two (hands)’.²³ But in fact, there is nothing in this sentence of *Gylfaginning* apart from the

folk-etymological explanation of *úlfliðr* ('wrist') which is not also in *Lokasenna* 38; it seems peculiar for Snorri to describe a god in terms of what he is not (even allowing for rhetorical understatement) unless he had a source for doing so. So it seems likely that this sentence in *Gylfaginning* is based on the *Lokasenna* stanza and cannot be used as independent corroboration of it. Whether or not Týr is a competent arbitrator, that appears to be the role he is trying to play here; and as there is no other clear motive for him to intervene, I would suggest the possibility that he has an official function as arbitrator, just as Bragi is the official orator and Sif may be the official hostess (both suggested by Magnus Olsen [1960], II, 47, 53, 55).

Opinions of Týr have varied. Magnus Olsen (1960): II, 31 calls him open and chivalrous for his defence of Freyr, the god of peace who is his own opposite – a contrast which I would rather see as ironic. Heinrichs, on the other hand, calls him a militarist (Heinrichs [1970], 58). Ruggerini (1979), 64 suggests an explanation of why Týr is incapable as an arbitrator: being one-handed, he lacks the physical capacity to separate fighting men. I would suggest rather that Týr's incapacity, as seen by Loki, is a moral one. From his point of view as the Wolf's father, the binding of Fenrir is an act, not of courage on Týr's part, but of treachery. Mutilation as an outward sign of a man's treachery can also be seen in Egill's partial blinding of Ármóðr in *Egils saga* ch. 72 (ed. Sigurður Nordal [1933], ÍF 2, 228). To Loki, Týr's lost hand is the sign of a broken oath, and how can one trust an arbitrator who is himself an oath-breaker? No wonder Loki accuses him of not being 'even handed'.

Seen in this light, Týr's reply is pure cynicism (st. 39); it amounts to saying: 'Well, we may have tricked the Wolf and I lost my hand as you say, but it worked'. Loki's response looks at first like irrelevant and crude abuse: he alleges that Týr's wife has had a child by Loki himself, and that Týr has never had any compensation for this (st. 40). Týr's wife is otherwise unknown, and Magnus Olsen is probably right to suggest (Olsen [1960], II, 33–34) that she is made up for the occasion. But it is unlike this poet to make up such charges without any justification. Olsen also notes the irony that Týr, the patron of brave men undertaking duels, cannot challenge Loki to a *holmganga* to defend his own right. But that, I think, is the point: the only sort of arbitration that is appropriate for a warlike god like Týr is the *holmganga*, the arbitration of force; and the basic injustice of this has just been exemplified by Týr himself when he sought to justify a broken oath by saying that the deception was successful. The allegation about Týr's wife functions as a moral supposition, to show the inherent injustice of the *hólmanga*, in this casual assumption that whoever succeeds must be justified. What about the one-handed man? Is he not entitled to justice? Týr's argument has in effect been that might is right, and it has been

shown up as morally bankrupt in a way that makes him appear disgraced and ridiculous. Týr is thus another example of the god who is seen as unworthy in his special field of patronage, besides being an oath-breaker.

Once the attempted reconciliation has collapsed, Freyr is forced to intervene. The underlying dispute has been about him ever since the possible allegation of his incest with Freyja in st. 32, or at least since Njǫrðr's self-defence has hinged on Freyr's worth (st. 35), and Týr has also stressed his good qualities (st. 37). His method is to try to threaten Loki into silence by referring to his binding – he will be bound next unless he keeps quiet (st. 41). But Loki, too, knows what Fate has in store, and this first explicit allusion by one of the gods to the final breach between him and them merely shows him that he is winning. So he presses on, reminding Freyr that he is not only lustful and incestuous, but that his lust will be fatal to him and the gods at Ragnarøk, for in his passion for Gerðr he gave his sword away to her, and hence to the giants (st. 42). This story is certainly not made up by this poet; it is alluded to in *Völuspá* st. 52 (ed. Sigurður Nordal [1984], 102–04) as well as in *Gylfaginning* ch. 37 (ed. Faulkes [1982], 31; trans. Faulkes [1987], 32). The story in *Skírnismál* 23–25, where Skírnir threatens Gerðr with a sword immediately after offering her gifts, may be a distorted variant of it.

Byggvir, the next god to intervene, does so in a way which is both ridiculous and, for the gods, dangerous. His motive is clearly to back up his master Freyr, but his threats about grinding Loki to pieces (st. 43) show that he lacks Freyr's knowledge of Fate, and are comically like what happens to the barley of which he is patron:

‘Veiztu, ef ec øðli ættac sem
Inguna-Freyr,
oc svá sællicet setr,
mergi smæra mylða ec þá meinkráco
oc lemða alla í liðo.’

‘You know, if I had an estate like
Inguna-Freyr,
and so lovely a dwelling,
I would grind that malicious crow
smaller than marrow,
and lame him in every limb.’

The point is quickly made by a comparison with the British ballad *John Barleycorn*, whose hero may be a descendant of Byggvir:

They wasted, o'er a scorching flame
The marrow of his bones;
But a miller us'd him worst of all,
For he crush'd him between two stones. (Robert Burns's version)²⁴

Loki begins his reply by asking what this little thing is that has just spoken – the irritating technique of pretending not to recognise someone in order to diminish them. Magnus Olsen argues (Olsen [1960], II, 37–39) that the opening *Hvat er þat it litla, er ...* ‘What is that little thing, which ...’, is meant as the opening of a riddle, to which the answer is ‘hen’ – an interpretation suggesting petty chattering and *ergi* (cowardice and passive homosexuality). There is admittedly an element of riddling in *Lokasenna* in the device of delaying the naming of each new speaker, but this is not merely a straightforward example of that, since Byggvir is the only participant in the debate who is forced to name himself. *Hvat er ...* is not uncommon in eddic verse as a way of asking the name of a new arrival; Ruggerini (1979), 69 gives five other examples, none of which is a riddle.²⁵ And the adjective *lilli* may have been conventionally associated with Byggvir when he was being praised for courage and strength, as it sometimes is with John Barleycorn.²⁶ But the image of a hen clucking around the quern looking for loose grains is certainly present in st. 44 even if there is no riddle, and it prompts Byggvir into praise of his own status as patron of strong drink. He is ‘inspiring bold John Barleycorn’ – bold perhaps, but oblivious to the real significance of what is going on.

Loki’s second stanza against Byggvir (st. 46) attacks him on the two grounds of injustice and cowardice. The patron of barley is responsible for bread as well as drink, and he distributes it unjustly among men, giving some more than their share while subjecting others to famine. And as patron of drink, he is nowhere to be found in the straw on the floor when men fight in the hall. Drink is here seen as the causer of fights, and the image seems to be that the ale is spilt when men fight and runs away into the straw. So John Barleycorn is a coward after all; more important, he too is incompetent and unjust in his special sphere of patronage, unfair in distributing food and a strife-causing coward as patron of drink.

Heimdallr now sees a chance of averting the irreconcilable quarrel. The mention of Byggvir’s role as patron of strong drink gives him the chance to claim that Loki is only abusing the gods because he is drunk (st. 47). That is something Loki could accept without disgrace, especially since Heimdallr goes out of his way to point up the parallel with the drunkenness of Óðinn:

‘Qlr ertu, Loki, svá at þú er ørviti,
hví né lezcaðu, Loki?
þvíat ofdryccia veldr alda hveim,
er sína mælgí né manað.’

‘You are drunk, Loki, as well as out of
your wits;
why don’t you stop, Loki?
Because too much drink causes every
man
to forget his own tendency to talk.’

The first half of this stanza echoes Óðinn's words in st. 21:

‘Ǽrr ertu, Loki, oc ørviti,
er þú fær þér Gefion at gremi,’
(*Lokasenna* 21,1–3)

‘You are mad, Loki, and out of your
wits,
when you set out to vex Gefjon,’

and the second half contains echoes of *Hávamál* 11–14, where Óðinn advises against excessive drinking and recalls how drunk he became when he visited Gunnlōð and obtained the mead of poetry from her:

Era svá gott, sem gott qveða
 ql alda sona;
þvíat færa veit, er fleira dreccr,
 sins til geðs gumi. (*Hávamál* 12)

It isn't as good as they claim it to be,
the ale of the sons of men;
for the more a man drinks, the less he
knows about his own mind.

This reminiscence diminishes Óðinn somewhat in order to offer Loki a moderately honourable escape from the quarrel if he wants to take it.

But why is it Heimdalr who intervenes at this point? He has not been attacked, nor has anything just been said to give him a guilty conscience. It is true that he is Loki's archetypal opponent, both at Ragnarøk and in the early days of the gods,²⁷ but that does not explain why he intervenes here rather than at any other moment, nor why his speech is relatively conciliatory. I have only a tentative suggestion to make about this. The end of the stanza before Heimdalr speaks is concerned with Byggvir's cowardice when men are fighting in the hall; perhaps we should imagine Loki looking round for someone to attack in order to demonstrate his point. The only god against whom he ever fights physically is Heimdalr, so he is the obvious choice, and as Loki grabs Heimdalr we should imagine Byggvir diving for the straw just as Loki says he does. Heimdalr is then forced to respond in physical self-defence, but he knows what Loki is trying to achieve by provoking him, so he merely replies that Loki is fighting drunk. The drawback about this theory is that it would take quite a gifted performer to make it clear to the audience what is going on, though a light-hearted experiment with students at Durham has suggested that it might be quite possible if there were more than one performer.²⁸ It could be that the reason why Heimdalr is brought in at this point is simply that the poet must consider him at some point and has not yet done so; but in view of the careful motivation of most of the other interventions in the poem, this does not seem likely.

The other problem in this section concerns the implication of Loki's reply in st. 48. It is difficult to see why he should taunt Heimdalr with the mere fact

of his role as watchman of the gods, though he could be suggesting that it is a demeaning life because it ties Heimdallr to one place. That would explain Skaði's reference to Loki's own impending loss of liberty in the next stanza, so it is probably part of the meaning. But it leaves unexplained the strange statement *aurgo baki þú munt æ vera*. Bugge (1867), 401 suggested that *aurgo* is equivalent to *ǫrgu*, 'stiff', in which case Loki would be taunting Heimdallr with the discomfort of his extreme physical (and moral) uprightness. But as all Loki's other taunts are about what the gods themselves would consider their vices, this sneer against virtue seems unlikely. Magnus Olsen (1960), II, 44 tentatively suggests that *aurgo* may come from *argr*, 'homosexual' or 'cowardly', but it is difficult to make sense of that in this context, and an accusation that Heimdallr is *argr* would be out of keeping with every other tradition about him, and therefore not the sort of original invention that the poet makes elsewhere. So I fall back on the translation 'with a wet or muddy back'.²⁹ One might suggest that Loki is pointing out evidence that Heimdallr has been sleeping on the job, or at any rate lying down. We could then imagine Heimdallr, not as the trusty watchman standing listening at the window, as Magnus Olsen does,³⁰ but rather as sprawling on the turf wall of the *tún*, just as Einarr is found sprawling on the wall of the sheepfold at Grjótteigssel when Hrafnkell comes to exact vengeance from him in ch. 3 of *Hrafnkels saga*.³¹ But this interpretation has the drawback that no other source suggests that Heimdallr is a lazy watchman, or that he has a character consistent with this view.³²

There is, however, another, more interesting way in which Heimdallr might come to have a muddy back. The adjective *aurugr* occurs in only one other context in Old Norse verse; this is in *Völuspá* 27, where it refers to the muddy waterfall in the river which flows from Óðinn's pledge (i.e. his eye in *Urðarbrunnr*). That stanza also mentions Heimdallr and how his hearing lies pledged under *Yggdrasil*,³³ the tree which is described as:

hár baðmr, ausinn hvíta auri. a lofty tree, sprinkled with white mud.
(*Völuspá* 19,3–4)

Perhaps Heimdallr acquired the mud on his back as he walked away from the tree after depositing his hearing under it. In that case, he is being mocked as the assiduous watchman who has undermined his own effectiveness by rendering himself partially deaf, and this is then another instance of a god being seen as incompetent in his special area of responsibility. Such an interpretation depends on the word *hljóð* in *Völuspá* 27,1 being interpreted as 'hearing': but even if one were to revive the alternative explanation that what Heimdallr pledged under the tree was not his hearing but his horn, the implication for the context in *Lokasenna*

would not be greatly altered, for a watchman with no horn on which to sound the alarm would hardly be more effective than a deaf one. It is also possible that *aurgo* here carries giant associations, for the majority of compounds with *aur-* as first element noted in *LP* 24 are connected with giants. There are five giant-names (*Aurboða*, *Aurekr*, *Aurgelmir*, *Aurgrímnir*, *Aurnir*), one giant kenning (*aurmils Narfi*) and two names connected with dwarves, which may be related to the giant-names (*Aurvangar*, *Aurvangr*); against these, there are only three compounds which definitely have no giant associations (*aurborð*, *aurglasir*, *aurriði*). Perhaps Loki is implying that muddy giants may get into Ásgarðr behind the muddy back of the deaf watchman; it is at least possible that Skaði, who speaks next, understands him to mean this.

This brings us to the question why it is Skaði who intervenes next. For this poet, as for Snorri Sturluson in *Skáldskaparmál* ch. G56 (ed. Faulkes [1998], I, 2; trans. Faulkes [1987], 61), she is primarily the daughter of Þjazi, and therefore a giantess who has come among the gods. The suggestion that Heimdallr is an incompetent watchman against giants may include an implication, whether intended by Loki or inferred by Skaði herself, that she ought not to have been admitted to Ásgarðr. Such an implication would be unfair, at least if the tradition used by the poet of *Lokasenna* made it clear, as Snorri does, that the Æsir let Skaði in while discussing with her what compensation should be paid to her for the killing of her father Þjazi. But Loki's slurs do not have to be fair, and this one is given sufficient pretext by the mere fact of her presence among the gods.

Her attack on Loki sweeps away Heimdallr's attempt to reconcile the dispute as a piece of drunken argument, best ignored. She reminds Loki, in her blunt, coarse giantess fashion, of the most painful and unpleasant details of the binding that awaits him, presumably in an attempt to frighten him into delaying it. But Loki, intent on hastening a Fate he already foresees, has thought of that already, and responds by taunting her with his own prominent role in the death of her father (st. 50). This cruel mockery resembles the way he cast his responsibility for the death of Baldr in the face of Frigg (st. 28), and again it has a further sting in the tail, though this time that sting is delayed until Skaði has sworn eternal enmity towards him (st. 51). He mildly remarks (st. 52) that she was gentler in her words when she invited him to her bed. No other source mentions this liaison, and the poet may have invented it, though it seems more likely that something like the obscene horseplay of *Skáldskaparmál* lies behind it; here, Loki deliberately falls into Skaði's lap (or onto her knee) after tying his testicles to the beard of a goat:

Pat hafði hon ok í sættargjörð sinni at Æsir skyldu þat gera er hon hugði at þeir skyldu eigi mega, at hlægja hana. Þa gerði Loki þat, at hann batt um skegg geitar

nökkvorrar ok qðrum enda um hreðjar sér ok létu þau ymsi eptir ok skrækti hvárt-
tveggja við hátt; þá lét Loki fallask í kné Skaða, ok þa hló hon; var þá gjör sætt af
Ásanna hendi við hana.

It was also in her terms of settlement that the Æsir were to do something that she thought they would not be able to, that was to make her laugh. Then Loki did as follows: he tied a cord round the beard of a certain nanny-goat and the other end round his testicles, and they drew each other back and forth and both squealed loudly. Then Loki let himself drop into Skadi's lap, and she laughed. Then the atonement with her on the part of the Æsir was complete.³⁴

Similarly suggestive connotations are attached to a sexually significant object (Þórr's hammer) in the lap or on the knee of a supposed woman in *Þrymskviða* 30. Like the poet's other inventions, it is in keeping with Skaði's known behaviour, and it also makes a moral point. Skaði came among the gods seeking honourable vengeance, but was fobbed off with offers of a marriage and amusement, things Loki can portray as sexual self-gratification. To allege that she has invited him to sleep with her may be to spring a surprise in the sense that the audience has not heard about it before, but it merely dramatises what they know she is like. She has betrayed her duty to her father and then changed sides, just as Loki himself seems to do in the opposite direction.

Sif now comes forward with the last and perhaps the most brazen attempt at a peace settlement (st. 53). Probably in her capacity as mistress of the feast (Olsen [1960], II, 47), she formally offers Loki a foaming cup of mead and, referring to herself in the third person, says that Loki must declare her at least to be without fault. She does not seem to be compelled to speak at this point, and her intervention looks simply like hubris. Her husband, at least, is no compromiser with giants, and Loki's claim to responsibility for the death of Þjazi has reminded us of Þórr's rather odd claim in *Hárbarðsljóð* 19 that he struck Þjazi and then threw his eyes into heaven to become stars:

‘Ec drap Þíaza, inn þrúðmóðga iqtun,
upp ec varp augom Allvalda sonar
á þann inn heiða himin;
þau ero merki mest minna verca,
þau er allir menn siðan um sé.’

‘I killed Þjazi, the furious giant;
I threw up the eyes of Allvaldi's son
into that bright sky;
they are a very great sign of my deeds
which all men can see ever after.’

We know that the poet of *Lokasenna* had *Hárbarðsljóð* in mind, for he makes Þórr echo this stanza, with the addition of a contrasting negative, in *Lokasenna* 59,4–6:

Upp ec þér verp oc á austrvega,
 síðan þic mangi sér.

I shall throw you up and onto the ways to the east –
 no one will see you afterwards.

Any reference to Þjazi is likely to stir up enmity between Skaði and those deities who feel she should not be among them, and Sif is the obvious representative of these, whether because of Þórr having struck Þjazi or out of jealousy of Skaði when Þórr was subsequently kind to her. So it is no surprise that Sif should try to score a point at Skaði's expense. It is less obvious why she thinks she will get away with it, especially as the first half of her stanza is a close echo of the first half of *Skírnismál* 37, the stanza in which Gerðr promises sexual submission to Freyr:

‘Heill verðu nú heldr, sveinn, oc tac við hrímkálki, fullom forns miaðar!’	‘Rather be welcome now, lad, and take a foaming cup full of old mead!’
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(*Skírnismál* 37,1–3)

Perhaps we should see her as so full of vanity that she thinks all Loki's abuse of the other female characters has been designed to flatter her by contrast. If so, she receives the disappointment she deserves, and this time the poet is probably not inventing anything, for Sif's lover is also known to *Hárbarðsljóð* (st. 48). Like so many others, hers is a portrait of hypocrisy and sexual treachery.

There have been many disputes about the meaning and significance of Beyla, who seems to be a servant to Sif in much the same way as Byggvir is to Freyr. The three modern interpretations of her name known to me are as ‘bean’, from P.Gmc. **baunilō* (Sievers [1894], 584); as a personification of mead made from honey, from P.Gmc. **biuilō* ‘little bee’ (Dumézil [1973], 102–05); and as connected with *baula*, ‘cow’ (Olsen [1960], II, 36). The last interpretation seems the most probable. It is the only one which does not raise serious philological difficulties; it explains why Beyla should be the wife of Byggvir, for farming divides naturally into crop growing and animal husbandry, with the latter often seen as a female activity (see Nils Lid [1928], 147), and barley and cow are natural symbols for them in the Norse context; and it explains why the poet of *Lokasenna* calls Beyla a milkmaid, dairywoman or housekeeper (*deigia*, 56,6).³⁵ The only specific accusation Loki makes against her is that she is unclean, being spattered with dung. As any farming community would know, the essential requirement of a dairymaid is that she must be clean; even at this lowly level, therefore, the

specialist deity is being accused of incompetence, and like Byggvir, she tends to parody and undermine the pretensions of the deity she serves.

The entry of Þórr ought to be the poem's climax, and opinions have varied about the poet's view of him. Einar Ólafur Sveinsson thinks that he is to be admired, and Klingenberg sees him as successful in supplanting Loki as the final member of a 'bench' of thirteen judges, the one for whom Loki himself has hitherto acted as self-appointed substitute,³⁶ but the majority of critics have taken a more severe view.³⁷ If my interpretation of Loki's purpose is correct, Þórr is quite simply a fool. He makes no attempt to delay the final breach with Loki, but charges straight in with violent threats which we know are in contradiction of Fate and therefore cannot be carried out. Each of his stanzas has the same threatening first half:

‘Þegi þú, rög vætr! þér scal minn þrúðhamarr, Mjöllnir, mál fynrema. (<i>Lokasenna</i> 57,1–3, cf. also stanzas 59, 61, 63)	‘Be quiet, vile creature! My glorious hammer Mjöllnir shall deprive you of words.’
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This creates an impression of poverty of imagination – he cannot think of any other opening. His threats to knock Loki's head off (st. 57), to throw him far to the east (i.e. into the realm of giants, st. 59), to break every bone in his body (st. 61), to send him down to Hel (st. 63), sound like empty bombast. Loki's replies, by contrast, are all different and all hit the mark. He reminds Þórr that he will fail to fight the Wolf at Ragnarøk (st. 58), of his cowering in Skrímir's glove (st. 60) and his inability even to untie Skrímir's meal bag (st. 62).³⁸ All of these suggest that Þórr is incompetent in his special role of defending the gods against the giants, and this time the failing will be fatal to the gods.

The end of the poem is sometimes interpreted as Loki venting his fury at having been defeated by Þórr in being driven out of the hall. But if Loki's aim was to hasten Ragnarøk, Þórr is merely stupid. It is not even heroic stupidity, for Loki unerringly points out the occasions when Þórr was or will be afraid, and Magnus Olsen (1960), I, 40–43 shows how the word *einheri* (60,5) puns on the otherwise non-existent singular of the commonplace mythological *einherjar*, the warrior defenders of Valhøll, and the less flattering sense ‘solitary hare’ – an animal traditionally associated with cowardice.³⁹ To emphasise the accusation of cowardice, *Hárbarðsljóð* is echoed for the second time in two stanzas:

oc þóttisca þú þá Þórr vera. (<i>Lokasenna</i> 60,6, cf. <i>Hárbarðsljóð</i> 26,5)	and you didn't think then that you were Þórr.
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Olsen takes it that *Hárbarðsljóð* is the borrower here because the line is more pointed in *Lokasenna*, where it forms the end of the stanza. But that is merely to say that the poet of *Lokasenna* is more accomplished than the compiler of *Hárbarðsljóð*, and since two stanzas from different parts of *Hárbarðsljóð* are paralleled in *Lokasenna* 59–60, the first with an ironic reversal (with *Lokasenna* 59 compare *Hárbarðsljóð* 19 and see above), it seems more likely that *Lokasenna* is the borrower.

Admirers of Þórr can, up to this point, console themselves with the thought that he is at least a god with integrity, unlike all the others; but in Loki's parting shot to him, even that illusion is removed:

‘enn fyr þér einom mun ec út ganga,
þvíat ec veit, at þú vegr.’

(*Lokasenna* 64,4–6)

‘but for you alone I will go out,
because I know you do strike.’

How does Loki know that Þórr strikes? The probable answer is that the poet and his audience remember *Völuspá* 26:

Þórr einn þar vá, þrunginn móði,
hann sialdan sitr, er
hann slíct um fregn;
á genguz eiðar, orð oc særi,
mál qll meginlig er á meðal fóro.

Þórr alone struck there, swollen with
rage;
he seldom sits still when he hears of
such a thing;
oaths were trodden underfoot, words
and swearing,
all the mighty speeches which had
passed between them.

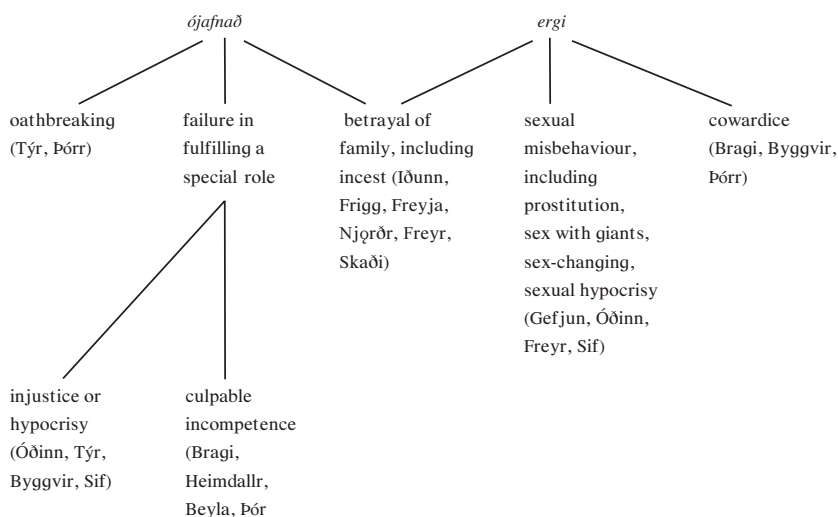
Þórr is an oath-breaker as well as a fool, and even his pathetically repetitive threats ultimately remind us of this. The conclusion must be that all or nearly all the gods who intervene do so for self-serving motives, and are rightly humiliated.

IV. The Vices of the Gods

If Loki's intention all along has been to provoke a final breach with the gods, and thus to hasten Ragnarøk, his driving out represents his ultimate success. Until then, the gods have it in their power to delay Ragnarøk indefinitely; after they have driven Loki out and subsequently bound him, the initiative passes out of their hands. The taunts which finally push Þórr into committing the irredeemable

act on their behalf are successful only because they are true, and the faults of the gods are therefore in a real if indirect sense the cause of their own fall – a situation very like that of *Völuspá*. In *Völuspá* 39 the crucial offences, for which men are condemned to wade in Vaðgelmir, are oath-breaking, murder and adultery, and the gods themselves are also guilty of them (see essay 2). In *Lokasenna* the faults are not quite the same ones, but they are similarly systematic, and can be summarised under the general headings of *ójafnað* ('injustice') and *ergi* (both 'sexually disgraceful behaviour' and 'cowardice'), as follows:

Figure 7.1



Loki himself shares many of these faults, and unlike the others makes no attempt to hide them. He, too, is a betrayer of family, for he is related, actually or as foster-brother, to both gods and giants. (For his obligation to the gods, see his oath of foster-brotherhood with Óðinn in st. 9; and he is related to the giants through his traditional father, Fárbauti).⁴⁰ Yet he has betrayed both Baldr and Þjazi to their deaths (stanzas 28, 50). He is also an oath-breaker, for his whole attack on the gods breaches his oath of foster-brotherhood with Óðinn. He is a sex-changer (stanzas 23, 33) and has also, it is implied, had sex with the giantess Skaði (st. 52). His cowardice may be implied in the references to the story of Þjazi,⁴¹ although in general the determination of his attack on the gods shows considerable courage. Only in the competent fulfilment of his specialist role is he above reproach – but unfortunately, that special role is as traitor.

The comparison with *Völuspá* is not casual, for these are the only two mythological poems in the Poetic Edda which show a clear concern with the whole progress of the gods from ancient times to Ragnarök, and the only two which see a moral causality in that progress. There are, however, two great differences between them. The first is that *Lokasenna* has a surface of comic mockery. It is indeed a highly entertaining poem, especially when performed aloud, and some critics (e.g. Anne Holtmark [1965], 678–80) have seen comic entertainment as its sole purpose. But that is to mistake surface for substance. This is not the comedy of the absurd, but rather resembles the outrageous truth-telling which is permitted only to the fool and the rascal. To take an analogous example, when Folie in Sir David Lindsay's *Satire of the Thrie Estaitis*, preaching on the text *Stultorum numerus infinitus* ('the number of fools is infinite'), looks at the religious wars raging in sixteenth-century Europe and comments:

I think it folie, be God's mother,
Ilk Christian Prince to ding down uther,⁴² (4621–22, ed. Happé [1979], 614)

he is telling no more than truth, a truth which the official view imposed by those in power forbids all but the fool from mentioning. Thersites in Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida* and the Fool in *King Lear* are bitter, truth-telling fools in the same mould. But Loki is not in the end an 'allowed fool' of this kind. He also has the menace of the truth-telling devil about him, and reminds us, in his gloating fashion, that wickedness and folly will ultimately have to be paid for. In this, he more closely resembles the devils in the Wakefield *Judgement*:

Bot sir, I tell you before,
had domysday oght tarid
We must have biggid hell more,
the warld is so warid. (*The Judgement* 261–64)⁴³

[biggid = built; warid = cursed (with wickedness)]

As soon as this note is introduced, the underlying import of the poem must be regarded as serious and menacing, however entertaining its surface may be. Klingenberg's demonstration (Klingenberg [1983], 149–50) that one function of Ægir's feast is to act as a solemn trial also underlines the fundamental seriousness of the poem.

The second major difference between *Völuspá* and *Lokasenna* is that the latter gives no hint of anything after Ragnarök. One might suggest various explanations for this, but most of them would involve some assumption about whether the poet

himself was heathen or Christian, and I would like to reserve judgement on that question.⁴⁴ One may note in passing, however, the apparent echoes in *Lokasenna* of stanzas from *Völuspá*, *Hávamál*, *Vafþrúðnismál*, *Skírnismál* and *Hárbarðsljóð*, which suggest that at least some parts of all of those poems are in some form earlier than *Lokasenna*. The ironic slant given to most of these echoes suggests that *Lokasenna* is the borrower in each case, and that implies a relatively late date for it, and thus increases the possibility of Christian influence.

One purely literary explanation for the absence of any mention of a world after Ragnarök might be that the poem is presented from Loki's viewpoint, and that he himself has no perception of such a world. If he had, he would hardly be so anxious to hurry it on. There may, as suggested elsewhere (e.g. *Völuspá* 65, ed. Sigurður Nordal [1984], 118–21); *Vafþrúðnismál* 51; *Hyndluljóð* 44), be one or more who will come after, but as *Hyndluljóð* puts it:

Fáir sjá nú fram um lengra
enn Óðinn man úlfi mæta. (44,5–8)

Few now see further into the future
than that Óðinn must meet with the
wolf.

And in a world of treacherous fools who must pay for their deeds, perhaps the last of them is Loki himself.

NOTES

- 1 The first version of this paper was delivered to the Scandinavian Studies Seminar at University College London in November 1985; I am grateful to those who contributed to the discussion on that occasion. Some of its ideas originated from my discussion of *Lokasenna* with Geoffrey Daniel during his MA course at Durham in 1978, and I would also like to thank him.
- 2 Further on this particular enmity see Heinrichs (1970), 44–45 and Turville-Petre (1964), 147.
- 3 See e.g. *Völuspá* 55–56, ed. Sigurður Nordal (1984), 106–09; *Gylfaginning* ch. 51, ed. Faulkes (1982), 50–51 and trans. Faulkes (1987), 54.
- 4 See Bailey (1980), 126–28.
- 5 Magnus Olsen (1960), I, 116–17.
- 6 Meulengracht-Sørensen (1988) also emphasises the poem's references to Ragnarök, but thinks that Loki's intrusion into Ægir's feast is designed to frustrate an attempt by the gods to extend their control into the giant world by means of peaceful alliances.
- 7 For a less sceptical view of the motivations of the gods than mine, see Anderson 1981 (reprinted 2002); he thinks that the gods have learned from their past sins and follies, and that most of them now defend each other out of mutual generosity.

- 8 Further on criteria for assessing borrowings from other eddic poems, see Söderberg (1986).
- 9 Magnus Olsen (1960), II 53–55.
- 10 Magnus Olsen (1960), II, 54.
- 11 Magnus Olsen (1960), I, 115–16; Ruggerini (1979), 27, 56.
- 12 *Ragnarsdrápa* 13 (*Skj.* I B, 3; Kock I, 12); *Gylfaginning* ch. 1 (ed. Faulkes [1982], 7; trans. Faulkes [1987], 7).
- 13 Meulengracht Sørensen (1980), 28; Meulengracht Sørensen (1983), 24.
- 14 On social attitudes towards *seiðr*, see Strömbäck (1970), 76–79.
- 15 Meulengracht Sørensen (1980), 103–04; Meulengracht Sørensen (1983), 83–84; *Sturlunga saga*, ed. Jón Jóhannesson, Magnús Finnbogason and Kristján Eldjárn (1946), I, 395; trans. McGrew and Thomas (1970–74), I, 299.
- 16 See the same story in *Ynglinga saga* ch. 3, ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson (1941): ÍF 26, 12; trans. Laing (1961), 8; trans. Finlay and Faulkes (2011), 7.
- 17 Ed. Faulkes (1982), 45; trans. Faulkes (1987), 48.
- 18 Ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson (1941): ÍF 26, 13; trans. Laing (1961), 9; trans. Faulkes and Finlay (2011), 8.
- 19 Loki accuses both Freyja (32,3) and Beyla (56,3) of being *meini blandin mið* ‘very much mingled with harm’, implying moral pollution in the first case and physical pollution in the second; further on the use of *blandin(n)* in *Lokasenna*, see Borovsky (2002), 2–7.
- 20 See e.g. Olsen (1960), II, 22–23, and cf. the story of the binding of Mars and Venus in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* Book IV, and Bömer (1969–80), II, 68–69.
- 21 Magnus Olsen (1960), II, 28–30; Turville-Petre (1964): 163.
- 22 Ed. Faulkes (1982), 25; trans. Faulkes (1987), 25.
- 23 This has been proposed as the sole meaning by Alfred Jakobsen (1979); I agree that the concrete sense is probably present, but not that it is the only meaning. It is not safe to assume that we understand Old Norse idiom better than Snorri did in interpreting the phrase in *Gylfaginning* ch. 25 as *ok ekki kallaðr sættir manna* ‘and (he is) not considered a promoter of settlements between people’. The resemblance to the accusations that Óðinn never knew how to *deila víg með verom* ‘decide a fight (justly) between men’ (22,3), and that Byggvir never knew how to *deila með mǫnnum mat* ‘apportion food (justly) between people’ (46,3) suggests the sense ‘to decide something properly between two (parties)’. Jakobsen also thinks that Loki mocks Týr’s disability because he has nothing else to reproach him with – a verdict that strikes me as unduly charitable to Týr.
- 24 *Poetical Works*: ed. Robertson (1928), 389. This ballad survives in many versions and is certainly not by Burns in the usual sense in which a poet claims to have composed a poem; however, the modern versions, for some of which see *Cecil Sharp’s Collection of English Folk Songs*, ed. Karpeles (1974), II, 171–79, are

generally more remote from *Lokasenna* than Burns's admittedly slightly 'polished' or artificial text.

- 25 See Ruggerini (1979), 69: (*Vafþrúðnismál* 7; *Alvíssmál* 2, 5; *Reginismál* 1; *Baldrs draumar* 5). One might add *Fjölsvinnsmál* 1, 3, for which see SG I, 200–01.
- 26 See the set phrase 'little Sir John' (Karpeles, ed. [1974], II, 178), and the early seventeenth-century broadside 'The Little Barly-Corne', *The Roxburghe Ballads*, II, (1874), 28–33.
- 27 See Heinrichs (1970), 44; Turville-Petre (1964), 147.
- 28 For a more detailed argument that *Lokasenna* may have been intended for recitation or performance by more than one performer, see Gunnell (1995), 238–47.
- 29 For this interpretation, see e.g. de Vries (1956–57), II, 241.
- 30 Olsen (1960), II, 44.
- 31 Ed. Jón Jóhannesson (1950): ÍF 11, 104; ed. Gordon (1957), 64; trans. Gunnell (1997): (ch. 5), *CSI* 5, 265.
- 32 See Turville-Petre (1964), 149, 154.
- 33 See *Vpluspá*, ed. Sigurður Nordal (1984), 56–57; Turville-Petre (1964), 149–50.
- 34 *Skáldskaparmál* ch. G56; ed. Faulkes (1998), I, 2; trans. Faulkes (1987), 61.
- 35 Brink (2008), 6–7 points out that the etymology of *deigia* connects it with *deig* 'dough', and implies that the title originally referred to a female baker, but the accusation against her in *Lokasenna* implies close contact with farm animals, so she is probably to be seen as a milkmaid.
- 36 Einar Ólafur Sveinsson (1962), 317–21; Klingenberg (1983), 152.
- 37 See e.g. Heinrichs (1970), 60–62; de Vries (1967), 121–23.
- 38 For the story which includes both these details, see *Gylfaginning* ch. 45, ed. Faulkes (1982), 37–39; trans. Faulkes (1987), 38–39.
- 39 For the traditional expression *hafa hera hjarta* 'to have the heart of a hare (i.e. to be cowardly)', see Fritzner (1954), I, 798.
- 40 On Fárbaúti, see *Haustlǫng* 5 (*Skj.* I B, 15; Kock I, 10); *Gylfaginning* ch. 33 (ed. Faulkes [1982], 26; trans. Faulkes [1987], 26); Turville-Petre (1964), 127.
- 41 With stanzas 50–51 compare *Haustlǫng* 1–13 (*Skj.* I B, 14–17; Kock I, 9–11) and *Skáldskaparmál* ch. G56 (ed. Faulkes [1998], I, 1–2; trans. Faulkes [1987], 60).
- 42 'for each Christian prince to smite down the next'.
- 43 *The Towneley Plays*, ed. Stevens and Cawley (1994), 408.
- 44 For a discussion of dating which distinguishes usefully between the poet of the version of *Lokasenna* that we now have and the originator(s) of the mythical confrontation dramatised in it, see Meulengracht-Sørensen (1988), 239–44, 257–59.

8 Myth as Therapy: The Usefulness of *Þrymskviða*¹

I. Date and Provenance

One of the major embarrassments of discussing the mythological poems of the *Poetic Edda* has always been the lack of a clear consensus on the date of many poems. Not only can we not agree about whether some poems date from the tenth century or the early thirteenth, but we cannot even decide whether they were composed by heathens who genuinely believed in the myths they related, or by medieval Catholic Christians to whom they were at best amusing fictions (if not lies devised by the devil). This obviously affects not only the background culture within which they were composed, but the basic interpretation of their subject-matter.

The arguments about the date of *Þrymskviða* are a good example. Among modern scholars, Einar Ólafur Sveinsson² and Jónas Kristjánsson³ have argued for a pre-Christian origin for the poem, and this view has been strengthened by Bjarne Fidjestøl's statistical study of the frequency of the filler-particle *oflum* in eddic and skaldic verse.⁴ He demonstrates that in skaldic verse, much of which can be approximately dated, most early poets use the particle heavily, while it becomes progressively rarer in later poetry. Furthermore, while there are some early skaldic poets who make less than average use of it, there are no poets after the early eleventh century in whose work its frequency is above the average for the whole corpus. *Þrymskviða* shows heavier use of it than any other eddic poem, and by a long margin; this would seem to suggest a very early date.

At the other extreme, de Vries,⁵ Hallberg (1954), Magerøy (1958), Kvillerud (1965) and Jakobsen (1984) have all dated *Þrymskviða* to the first half of the thirteenth century, though for different reasons. Four main arguments for this dating have been advanced:

1. Its use of end-rhyme and repetition, and the virtual absence of anything resembling a kenning, seem reminiscent of later Scandinavian ballads.⁶
2. Its apparently erratic patterns of alliteration might suggest a late loosening of the traditional rules of eddic verse.⁷
3. It narrates a myth which is found nowhere else, and is not quoted in *Snorra Edda*.⁸
4. It has been argued to contain echoes from a variety of earlier poems.⁹

I think it is possible to resolve this problem, though not with a simple decision in favour of one view or the other. A number of details of the vocabulary, metre and cultural background of the poem suggest Anglo-Scandinavian origins: the words *fjaðrhamr* ‘coat of feathers’ (*Prymskviða* 3,6; 5,2; 9,2), *þrúðugr* ‘courageous’ (*Prymskviða* 17,2), and *scillinga* ‘metal decorations on jewellery’ (*Prymskviða* 32,6)¹⁰ are all unique in ON verse but appear in verse in OE; the phrase *men Brisinga* (cf. *mene Brosinga*, *Beowulf* 1199)¹¹ is not found elsewhere in ON, while *Brisingamen* appears only in *Snorra Edda*.¹²

The metrical pattern of *Prymskviða* 1,4, *um sacnaði* ‘(Þórr) found (his hammer) missing’ is of a characteristically OE type, of which there are eighteen examples in the poems of Cynewulf alone.¹³ In ON eddic verse, this is one of only two examples of it (the other being *Völundarkviða* 28,4, in another poem which shows strong OE influences).¹⁴ The loose alliteration of the poem, and its occasional tendency to use extra, decorative alliteration, are also reminiscent of later OE verse, in which the same tendencies are also common.

The idea of the *fjaðrhamr* as a flying suit which can be tied onto someone without transformation into bird-form can also be paralleled, so far as I know, only in sources derived from authors and artists associated with the British Isles¹⁵ or the Angevin empire.¹⁶ It is also possible that the whole story of *Prymskviða*, which is unknown elsewhere in ON mythology, should be related to the Wooing Ceremony folk plays of the Anglo-Scandinavian East Midlands,¹⁷ which show many motifs that are very similar to our poem and occur only in an area (centred on Lincolnshire and east Nottinghamshire) in which Scandinavian settlement seems from the place-name evidence to have been intense.¹⁸

It is true that texts of these plays are recorded only from about 1800 onwards (between sixty and seventy having been collected in the small area in which they occur), but some of their motifs were clearly known much earlier. The wooing of the Lady by a variety of suitors beginning with an Old Man, in which she finally gives herself to the Fool/Protagonist, is borrowed into the 1552 Cupar *Banns* of Lindsay’s *Satire of the Thrie Estaitis*; and the hideous would-be bride may be reflected in a male minstrel who entertained (and probably offended) the Prior of Durham in 1433–34, and who rejoiced in the stage

name of 'Moder Nakett' (i.e. 'Mother-Naked').¹⁹ Some of these features (the huge man-as-lady in search of a husband, the male-acted ogress, the mock wedding and the violent denouement) are also to be found in a variety of Scandinavian folk rituals, some of which are certainly of medieval or earlier origin.²⁰ We need not, therefore, be inhibited from cautious use of the Wooing Ceremony plays by the accidental fact that they were recorded in detail only after they had probably survived centuries of official religious disapproval.

However, *Prymskviða* as we now have it cannot have been composed in northern England while Old Norse was still spoken there. The unique use of couplet end-rhyme in st. 1,2–4, together with the sheer extent of the thematically-used formulaic repetitions in the poem, suggest the influence of early ballads, which probably implies a revision of the poem in the twelfth century or later.

Prymskviða shows formulaic phrasal parallels with a number of other eddic and skaldic poems, including some of the later heroic poems in the cycle of the Burgundians, notably *Guðrúnarkviða I* and *Oddrúnargrátr*.²¹ These formulae are probably not borrowed from one poem into another in any deliberate sense, but rather look like stylistic habits of the eddic verse of a particular period, most likely the later twelfth century.

If this view of the poem's origins is anything like correct, we are forced to the conclusion that poems on the same mythological themes continued to be enjoyed over a very long period, probably both before and after the conversion to Christianity, and certainly irrespective of it in terms of continuity of tradition. If such poetry had been closely associated with heathen religious faith, that would seem surprising; and we may find it equally odd that Christian skaldic poets in Norse did not begin to produce what we would call 'religious poetry' (i.e. poetry committed to Christian devotion) until about the middle of the twelfth century. There are plenty of Christian references before that, to Christ, the Virgin, being on pilgrimage and so on, but they are cultural allusions in the course of secular poems, not devotional addresses to the deity, calls to penitence or the like. The first prayers in skaldic verse are incidental details, almost asides, at the beginning or end of poems of secular praise of rulers.²² A brief fragment survives from what may have been a devotional *Kristsdrápa* by Markús Skeggjason, composed before 1108;²³ but the earliest surviving example of a complete devotional poem is probably Einarr Skúlason's *Geisli*, from about 1154.²⁴ It is as if the whole concept of devotional poetry was alien to pre-Christian Norse culture and had to be slowly learned from the rest of Christendom after the Conversion. This suggests that poems about the heathen gods had probably had some other, non-devotional social function, one which could continue without implying heathen religious observance or belief. The main aim of this paper will be to suggest what that function may have been in the case of *Prymskviða*.

II. Comedy, Threat and the Incongruous

The superficial intent of *Þrymskviða* is obviously comic; in a society in which the roles and dress of each sex were firmly separated and enforced with heavy sanctions,²⁵ its central motif of reluctant cross-dressing was bound to seem either comic or disgraceful. At first sight, Þórr himself seems to be the butt of much of the humour:²⁶ he is ineffective when he finds the hammer missing (*Þrymskviða* 1,5–8), and when he borrows Freyja's coat of feathers, not for his own use, but only so that Loki can use it on his behalf (*Þrymskviða* 3,5–8; 5,1–2); he shows childish impatience when Loki returns (*Þrymskviða* 10,3–8); and then he is totally egocentric, telling Freyja she must marry a giant for his benefit (*Þrymskviða* 12) – a demand which promptly gets the dusty answer it deserves. But all this is in the early part of the poem, and later on, although his traditional gargantuan appetite and ferocious eyes are absurd in a supposed bride (*Þrymskviða* 25, 27), the comedy is primarily at the expense of the giant, who seems to be impressed by a 'woman' with these masculine characteristics. It is also tinged with suspense: what will happen if Þórr's disguise is unmasked before he can get the hammer back, and he is caught unarmed among his enemies?

The other gods are also seen in a comic light to some extent. Freyja's outraged sense of sexual propriety when she is told to marry a giant (*Þrymskviða* 13,7–10) is not to be taken seriously:²⁷ this is the goddess who is said in *Lokasenna* 30 (N-K 102) to have slept with every male god and elf in Óðinn's hall, and who in *Sqrla þáttur* ch. 1 sleeps with each of four dwarves in order to get the necklace which is her emblem (*FSN* II, 97–98). Promiscuity is of the essence of her character, and her real objection to sex with Þrymr is not sexual virtue, but only that giants are sexually repulsive.²⁸ We also see Heimdallr gloating as he dwells with unnecessary detail on the female attire that Þórr must adopt (*Þrymskviða* 15–16), and Loki volunteers to transform himself into a serving-maid with an alacrity which looks sexually questionable (*Þrymskviða* 20). The giants are presented even less sympathetically: Þrymr himself is aggressive, bombastic and stupid throughout, and the giant wedding is grotesque. In a human wedding, the bride would be welcomed by her husband's family and given a large bridal gift by her husband;²⁹ not only does that not happen here, but the giants' sister wrongfully demands the bridal adornments (*Þrymskviða* 29,5–10).

Underneath the comic surface, however, there is a strong air of menace, and much of this has to do with sexual insecurity. The opening words of the poem focus on Þórr's anger, but we soon discover that it is impotent anger. His lost hammer is clearly a symbol of both military and sexual power, as the end of the poem shows, when it is placed on the 'bride's' knees and Þórr instantly kills the giants with it.³⁰

This must have been widely understood in both heathen and early Christian times. Þórr's hammer was widely used as an amulet charm,³¹ and a miniature tenth- or eleventh-century bronze figure of a man with what looks like a rather phallic hammer on his knees from Eyrarland, north Iceland, is one of a group which have usually been thought to represent Þórr.³² In later Swedish folk ritual, a hammer continued to be used to consecrate the bridal bed.³³

It is therefore interesting that Þórr's opening outburst is echoed by Freyja (who embodies the female sexual principle) when he tells her to come to the giant worlds with him as a bride:

Reiðr var þá Vingþórr, er hann	Battle-Þórr was angry then, when he
vacnaði (<i>Þrymskviða</i> 1,1–2)	woke

Reið varð þá Freyja oc fnasaði,	Freyja was angry then, and snorted,
(<i>Þrymskviða</i> 13,1–2)	

Just as his hammer has been taken by the giants, so Freyja's necklace shatters when she is told to marry one of them.³⁴ Her necklace or girdle is as much her emblem as the hammer is Þórr's; it appears, hugely exaggerated, on another small idol, now in Statens Museum in Stockholm.³⁵ Marriage to a giant represents total denial of a woman's fecundity and sexual fulfilment, as we can see from Skírnir's curse on Gerðr in *Skírnismál* 31, 35 (N-K 75–76), and when the meaning of the necklace is denied, it is only natural that it should break. In the same way, the ring which signifies Völundr's bride breaks when Bǫðvildr wears it without respecting its meaning, and can only be repaired by her becoming what it denotes (*Völundarkviða* 26–28).³⁶ Both symbols – the hammer and the necklace – must have been important to the gender roles of both men and women; while one of them represented one's own sexuality, the other was the essential complement to it in the partner to whom one aspired. Thus for men, the loss of Freyja and the Brisingamen would represent both the loss of a desired sexual partner and the loss of 'proper' control over the marriage arrangements of their female relatives. For a woman, equally, the loss of the hammer represented both frustrating sexual inadequacy in her partner and the loss of personal security. Giants often represent sterility, cold and death,³⁷ and loss of potency to them by either sex is an insupportable social disaster that must be countered by any means possible, reputable or otherwise.

Many scholars have been troubled by two apparent inconsistencies in the text, both to do with confusions of sexuality or gender roles. The first concerns the couplet:

við scolom aca tvau í iqtunheima.

We two shall drive to the worlds of
giants.

which occurs twice (*Þrymskviða* 12,7–8; 20,5–6), with the numeral in the neuter form, normally used of a mixed-sex group. This is what we would expect in the first case, where the ‘two’ are Þórr and Freyja, but not in the second, where they are Þórr and Loki. This has usually been interpreted in terms of gender role, as mockery of Þórr, with Loki addressing him as a woman now that he is dressed like one.³⁸ But Loki himself has just stated that he will also adopt female dress, and unlike Þórr he has done so without obvious necessity or persuasion. Other instructions or intentions expressed by characters in this poem are assumed to have been carried out instantly, without further description;³⁹ it is therefore most natural to assume that Loki’s transformation to female form takes place as soon as he has announced it.

Þórr, though dressed as a female, is still to any objective eye or imagination obviously male. If early listeners to *Þrymskviða* had any mental picture of him at this point, it was probably as something like the modern Icelandic ‘Háa-Þóra’, or ‘the Lady’ in the English Wooing Ceremony plays, a figure with some stylised female attributes, but actually a role played by a man who looks nothing like a real woman.⁴⁰ But Loki’s change of sex is no mere change of role and clothes, but a biological transformation. When they are both in female dress, Þórr is consistently given masculine titles⁴¹ except in the direct speech of Þrymr (who is deceived) and Loki (who is maintaining the deception), so that we are constantly reassured of his maleness. Loki, by contrast, is called *in alsnotra ambót* ‘the very wise serving maid’, as if he has actually become female (*Þrymskviða* 26,1–2; 28,1–2).

The second apparent inconsistency appears when Þórr and Loki drive to the giant worlds pulled by Þórr’s goats, rather than, as one would expect of Freyja, by her cats (*Þrymskviða* 21,1–4).⁴² It would also have seemed odd, if a realistic deception were required, for Freyja to come to the giant worlds without a male companion; certainly, Þrymr himself anticipates that someone will bring her to him (*Þrymskviða* 8,5–8), and in normal social practice a woman was ‘given away’ by a male relative (a detail that survives in wedding ritual even today).⁴³

Even stranger is the fact that although the gods apparently hope to regain the hammer, no-one who might be expected to return to Ásgarðr after the ‘wedding’ is sent to fetch it. In terms of realistic logic, this is inconsistent, but in this poem, where narrative is symbolic rather than realistic, it is beside the point. The Æsir are in a position of military inferiority, and must at least appear to do Þrymr’s bidding, whether or not they have any real hope of regaining the

hammer. Another hint that the giant sees himself as superior in power to the gods can be seen in his determination to hold the wedding in his own hall, for Norse weddings were usually held at the home of the bride.⁴⁴ Weddings at the bridegroom's estate, like that of Snorri Sturluson at Hvammr,⁴⁵ seem to have been common only when his family was clearly richer and more powerful than that of the bride. This detail underlines Þrymr's arrogance and Þórr's temporary humiliation – but it still does not explain Þórr's arrival in Jötunheimar without an officially male companion.

This point has gone unnoticed because 'Freyja' is actually brought by the male Þórr himself, and it is he (not 'she') who recovers the hammer. We never forget his male personality, of which the goat-drawn chariot is a part, so we unconsciously accept the incongruous social detail. What matters to the ogre is not verisimilitude, but emblem: the newcomer is dressed as the bride, and above all is wearing the Brísingamen, and therefore becomes the symbol of divine female sexuality. Seeing this, Þrymr is blinded by his desire to almost everything else; even so, Þórr is so unconvincing as a female that some quick-witted feminine deviousness is required from the now actually female Loki to save him (*Þrymskviða* 26, 28).

But there is a further apparent inconsistency which arises from my previous argument: if the Brísingamen shatters because Freyja's sexual function is denied by the suggestion that she marry a giant, then how is it possible for it to be mended so that Þórr can wear it in what appears to be an even more blatant defiance of its emblematic meaning?⁴⁶ This question leads us to the heart of what the poem is 'about', and may be couched either in terms of relationships or of the psychology of the self. I shall end this paper by outlining some ideas which are designed to approach this problem, and considering how far it is theoretically proper to use them.

III. The Resolution of Fear – A Social Reading

A great deal of comedy functions either as exorcism (we laugh at an absurd exaggeration of what we fear) or as therapy (we enjoy the triumph of our protagonist(s) over what we fear); in these terms, *Þrymskviða* is ultimately therapeutic. Þórr is the protagonist, and his waking to discover the loss of his hammer could represent the loss (or fear of loss) of male social and sexual status.⁴⁷ In Norse society the loss of sexual identity, and in particular castration or the perception that a man was *argr*, inevitably degraded the victim from public office, legal rights, and even from any existing or potential marriage.⁴⁸ Þórr's immediate objection to being dressed as a woman is that he will be

called *argr* (*Þrymskviða* 17,4) – a word which meant both ‘passively homosexual’ and also ‘cowardly’. Þrymr might then represent external threats to the protagonist’s status and potency (such as fear of being castrated, cuckolded, or regarded as a passive homosexual, and/or of being removed from his military, social or marital position). The scenario the giant wants would deprive the male gods of the female sexual principle, and hence of any ‘respectable’ (i.e. heterosexual) sexual fulfilment. It would also deny them the right to decide on the marriages of their own female relatives; and the acceptance of this disgrace would in itself be enough to label Þórr as *argr*.⁴⁹

But there is no reason to think that the audiences or even the composers of eddic poetry were exclusively male,⁵⁰ and the poet also addresses a congruent female fear: that a woman might be denied sexual fulfilment or an honourable role in society because of the folly or cowardice of her male relatives in the marriage arrangements they made for her. That this was presented as female experience often enough to generate generally understood symbols is demonstrated by the horror with which marriage to a giant is regarded in Old Norse literature; and since a woman could not initiate her own marriage and was not necessarily asked to agree to it,⁵¹ it was a fate she could do little to avoid, beyond using her often considerable eloquence to persuade her menfolk to fulfil her wishes. That is exactly what Freyja does in *Þrymskviða* 13; and the breaking of the Brisingamen symbolises female fear of betrayal by male relatives as vividly as the loss of Mjöllnir embodies the male fear of lost manhood.

But such female inciters had to be careful, for the charge that a man was *argr* was damaging in itself, whether it was true or not, and might harm the prospects of the woman who made the accusation as well as the male relative against whom she directed it.⁵² That may be why Freyja refrains from pointing out that in being initially prepared to agree to Þrymr’s blackmail, Þórr is already to some degree *argr*; after this, his ‘manly’ objection to being dressed as a woman comes a little late.

However, at this point one must pause to ask whether the fear I have just outlined is likely to have been actual among the poem’s first female hearers in the ‘historical audience’, or at least persuasive enough to have induced suspension of disbelief in female members of the ‘narrative audience’ (that is, the poem’s engaged hearers or readers in any period). Or is it merely an erroneous construct of the ‘feminine’ as imagined in his ‘authorial audience’ by a male author whose effective imagination was limited to an understanding of the male role?⁵³

A male critic may be wise not to pronounce too readily on this question, but in practice, such misleading constructs seem most likely to occur in societies (like our own) in which accepted gender roles are changing or subject to

dispute, and this does not seem to have been the case in early Norse society. The threat in a runic love-charm from Bergen that the woman will suffer intolerable craving (and perhaps the sexual appetites of a giant)⁵⁴ unless she gives her love to the carver suggests that the threat of denial of sexuality was real enough for women and understood well enough by some men for them to seek to make practical use of it. The female inciter is so common in Norse literature that it is hard to believe that she corresponds to nothing in the experience of contemporary men and women; and while there are cases in the sagas of women who dissolve or disrupt marriages about which they have not been properly consulted,⁵⁵ I know of no case in which a woman argues that it is wrong in principle for the head of her family to accept or refuse offers of marriage on her behalf.⁵⁶ There seems to be no reason to think that intelligent and mature men and women were likely to produce serious misreadings of each other's likely reactions; the poet (of either gender) was probably able to address the actual fears of both genders in a mixed audience with reasonable accuracy.

To return to analysis of the male role, Þórr's initial readiness to accept Prymr's demand is foolish in two different ways. First, it attempts to regain military self-respect by accepting the loss of sexual honour – which is impossible, because the two are inextricably linked (hence, for example, the many skaldic verses by men which invoke a woman as approving audience for boasts about military exploits).⁵⁷ Secondly, it is recklessly unbalanced in valuing the male principle (the hammer) exclusively and being prepared to sacrifice the female principle (Freyja and the Brísingamen) to it. This is unrealistic, for without a wife and offspring a man's social status has no dynastic viability. Pretty soon, as Loki points out (*Prymskviða* 18,5–8), it will lead to the feared external forces taking possession of one's property in the absence of any heirs who can inherit and defend it.

When Þórr finally accepts the need to put on female dress and drive off to Jötunheimar, he does not in human or divine terms make a very satisfactory female (nor would we want him to); but he is evidently impressive as a giantess (not surprisingly, if giantess figures like Grýla were already portrayed in folk ritual by large and physically powerful men).⁵⁸ Equally, his adoption of the Brísingamen is appropriate; he is, after all, going as a 'bride'. Finally, it is only when he adopts female garb and appears to accept the prospect of becoming literally *argr* (as the passive sexual partner of the giant – the ultimate male humiliation) that his courage, unarmed in the face of deadly risk, makes him genuinely impressive, a 'real man'.

But why, if the Brísingamen breaks at the prospect of a real goddess becoming the bride of a giant, is it apparently undamaged when the prospective 'bride' is not even female? It is as if the emblem colludes in Þórr's pretence,

and this suggests collaboration between the sexes. Once the male protagonist accepts his need for partial reliance on a female partner, she is very willing to help him, because her own fulfilment depends on his success. To put it in mythic terms, the Brísingamen needs Þórr to recover the hammer, and it is as much her destiny to help him seek it out (i.e. for the woman to re-empower her partner) as it is his to regain it. Freyja cannot regain the hammer for Þórr, for then he would be no real man; while accepting supportive help from a woman, he must achieve male self-respect for himself. That is why the protagonist's acceptance of the female principle must not extend to becoming a woman; Loki is present as an unsavoury reminder of what the protagonist must not be, just as the giants' sister is a nasty female obverse of masculinity, adopting an inappropriately aggressive role which seeks to remove what belongs to the bride.

IV. The Resolution of Fear: A Psychological Reading

Another way of looking at the same therapeutic process in *Prymskviða* might be to translate it into the terms of the individual male psyche (and I shall return shortly to the question of whether it is valid in literary-critical terms to do this). Þórr's loss of the hammer might then be understood as a loss by the conscious Ego of the will or power to act (since activity tended to be defined as male and passivity as female). The entity to whom he has lost the hammer (i.e. Prymr) is, in terms of Jungian dream analysis, the 'Shadow': the dark, negative side of his own unconscious personality, who is normally an evil figure of the same sex as the dreamer, who embodies his primitive, selfish drives towards power and sexuality and is characteristically ruthless and violent.⁵⁹ It is natural enough for the normal but immature male to feel that personal success depends on ruthlessness and violence. At the same time, he is repelled by the harm these qualities do, both to his relationships with others and to his control over impulses such as anger and bloodlust within himself, which deprive him of his own sense of humanity.

The Ego (=Þórr) must therefore negotiate with the Shadow in an attempt to regain control over his military and sexual actions; but this negotiation is itself rather disreputable, and must therefore be undertaken for him by Loki, an ambiguous 'mediator' figure who functions as an alibi enabling the Ego to disavow his necessary involvement with the Shadow.⁶⁰ (Equally, one might argue that the personification of the Shadow in an Other-World figure like Prymr is itself an alibi which enables the Ego to treat the Shadow as 'him, not me').⁶¹ Prymr's message to Loki, implying but not promising that Þórr may have the hammer back if he brings Freyja to him, is a deceit which cannot be trusted: Þórr has no

guarantee that the giant will keep his word. The Shadow is suggesting to the Ego that he can bring about internal unity only by allowing the Shadow to control his psycho-sexual life as well as his pursuit of power (and thus he has no real intention of releasing control of the hammer, which is symbolic of both).

However, the Ego is so anxious to regain power that he misguidedly puts the Shadow's proposal to Freyja; in this interpretation she represents the Anima, who is at once a personification of the idealised object of male erotic desire (i.e. his view of the female sexual principle) and the female voice of the protagonist's own unconscious.⁶² Not surprisingly, she revolts against the proposal to subject her to the psychic brutality of the Shadow, with his total barrenness of personal warmth; it is in keeping with this that giants are commonly portrayed as inhabiting a perpetually frozen land.⁶³

The Anima must not be ignored, and the Ego has to gather what wisdom he can from any reputable source (which corresponds to the advice given to Þórr by the council of gods and goddesses, *Þrymskviða* 14–18). The advice he receives is that he must represent the Anima to the Shadow by accepting his own feminine personality. It comes from Heimdallr, who as watchman of the gods against the giants⁶⁴ may here represent the Ego's perception of his own psychic and moral danger.⁶⁵ Naturally enough, in a society that distinguished gender roles so sharply, the Ego retorts (as some of the poem's audience may have felt) that if he follows this advice he will be regarded as *argr* (*Þrymskviða* 17,3–6). But this is not an actual objection to identifying with his feminine nature, but only the voice of his Persona, the role he plays in accordance with the expectations of society, whose concern is with how his behaviour will be perceived by others.⁶⁶ The danger faced by the Ego is so serious that the Persona's objection must be overruled; but because practicality here triumphs over what was regarded as socially acceptable, the voice which dismisses what the Persona says must again be an ethically dubious one, and it is thus appropriate that this speech (*Þrymskviða* 18) comes from Loki.

The Ego then has the task of deceiving the Shadow by representing the Anima, the object the Shadow desires to debauch. This may seem a morally questionable role, both because of the impersonation of the female and because it involves deception. Consequently, we have to be assured of Þórr's underlying masculinity by the fact that he is a thoroughly unconvincing 'female', and of his honesty by the fact that the words of deception, like those enforcing the 'disguise', are removed from him and given to the now completely female Loki (*Þrymskviða* 26,1–4; 28,1–4). The deception is successful because the Shadow, motivated solely by lust and aggression, can see only what he wants to see; and his final defeat comes about because the Ego, unlike the Anima (who really could be debauched), is not part of the unconscious. Once the conscious Ego is

mobilised by understanding of what the Shadow wants to inflict on the Anima, and by revulsion against it, he can consciously grab back the hammer that is rightfully his.

It may be wish-fulfilment to see the Shadow as totally and finally crushed by the reinvigorated Ego: in the psychology of real human beings he would slink back into the obscure corners of the unconscious and prepare to fight again another day.⁶⁷ But in this interpretation, *Prymskviða* presents a myth of encouragement, in which the demon can be finally slain; and in this it agrees with a thousand folktales.

It might be difficult to interpret *Prymskviða* in female psychological terms congruent with these; as a male critic, I am not really able to judge this. Clearly, the poem is mainly 'about' male figures; but a partial female sub-reading, with Þórr as the Animus and the Ego figure shifting from Freyja to the female transformation of Loki, might be possible, and could explain why there is also, albeit briefly, a female Shadow in the person of the giants' sister (*Prymskviða* 29, 32). Alternatively, she might be explained as the Crone Bride, a male fear of a repulsive partner equivalent to the female horror of marriage with a giant. This is certainly the role played by Old Dame Jane in the English Wooing Ceremony plays (who demands marriage with the Protagonist)⁶⁸ and by the Icelandic Háa-Þóra (who is violently thwarted in 'her' search for a husband).⁶⁹ But while the giant's sister does demand the bridal adornments, she cannot (except on a subliminal level) present herself as a potential bride for Þórr, who is still ostensibly female. At least on the surface, she seems more like a female Shadow figure.

V. Reconciliation

The social and psychological interpretations I have suggested here are not intended to be the only 'right' ways of looking at *Prymskviða*. Nor are they incompatible with each other: in fact they are to a large degree social and personal descriptions of the same four-stage process. In the first stage the protagonist realises his lack of social power, and this is associated with impotent rage (vividly seen in Þórr's reaction to his loss in *Prymskviða* 1) and an internal sense that only the ruthlessness associated with the Jungian Shadow figure can regain his lost status for him. In the second stage, he tries to regain his masculine self-respect by rejecting all that he perceives as feminine, and this corresponds to an internal willingness to place the Anima (and any woman who represents her) under the violent and oppressive control of the Shadow. It is an attempt which dramatises male weakness even as it tries to assert strength, and is doomed to failure. In the third stage, the protagonist learns to value the

feminine and to accept the female help he needs, and this corresponds to his internal preparedness to represent the Anima (i.e. to wear the clothes of Freyja). The final stage sees the mature protagonist, internally integrated and externally successful in relationships both of power and sexuality.

It is easy to raise objections to such social and psychological interpretations. One might be that *Þrymskviða* is 'only' a comic poem, and by 'over-interpreting' it we ruin the joke. This amounts to an anti-intellectual refusal to investigate why we find some stories funny, perhaps for fear of destroying the delicate bloom of comedy as we grasp it, or because of a half-realised fear of the horrors we may discover under the stone if we dare to lift it. If, as I believe, this comic poem (along with the transvestite rituals, ancient and modern, which it partially resembles) is funny because it sets out to combat a real fear, that fear will not depart simply because we understand it a little better – and consequently, nor will the comedy which dramatises our human resistance to it.

A second objection might be that medieval poets did not think in such social or psychological generalisations, but rather in terms of symbolic narrative.⁷⁰ This argument seems to me to mistake manner for substance. It is true that most medieval literature does not discuss in 'modern' terms the details of what its characters thought or felt at a particular moment (though there are some exceptions);⁷¹ but that does not prevent it from employing myths and symbols, such as Ragnarøk or the Holy Grail, which resonate with hidden significances. One might argue that the usefulness of papers like this one is precisely that they translate some part of the meaning inherent in these ancient symbols into modern terms (without, of course, exhausting their possibilities). The test of their success must be twofold: do they make consistent sense, and do they take due account of what we know of the prevailing social outlook of the period in which the work was composed?

A more refined version of this objection might say that the only theories that we can justifiably use in interpreting a medieval literary work are those which are made explicit in older works which it was at least possible for the composer(s) of our poem to have known and used. Since no medieval poet had ever read Jung's psychological theories, our objector might continue, interpretations based on them, or on the work of any other modern theorist, can only be taken seriously if we believe those theories to be objectively and universally correct for all historical periods. Of course, not every meaning read into a text by a modern critic can be regarded as possible – some may defy the literal meaning of the words in the text, or may put forward ideological positions that would have seemed absurd or appalling to anyone living in the society from which the poem originated (and I believe that the latter is a real danger in some modern criticism). But Jung's work is less open to this kind of historicist attack

than that of most modern theorists, because his archetypes are themselves based on the analysis of symbols derived from ancient myth, and what they are likely to have meant to what he calls 'archaic man'.⁷² For example, he argues that the Shadow is not merely a feature of modern individuals, but an ancient image of a 'numinous collective figure', and that this is proved by the survival of remnants of Shadow figures in 'carnival customs and the like'.⁷³ This immediately suggests figures like that of the Old Man and Beelzebub in the English Wooing Ceremony plays, and perhaps also their female equivalents, Dame Jane, Grýla and Háa-Póra (of whose existence Jung can hardly have been aware). His theories may contain misapprehensions of his own and limitations resulting from the period in which he lived, and they may well become obsolete in future. However, they are at least derived from serious and sympathetic attempts to interpret ancient thought, not from the impulse to appropriate it. And again, the final test of interpretations based on them must be a practical one: do we, for the time being, find them helpful?

If *Prymskviða* may be interpreted along these lines, one of its uses (distinct but not wholly separate from a function as communal entertainment) may have been as an optimistic, therapeutic poem about the loss of social and sexual identity, and how they may be regained through personal courage, exercise of the will and reconciliation between the sexes. It is not 'therapeutic' in the usual modern sense that it helps the author to confront his or her individual problems; as it probably reflects the work of more than one poet, time and environment, it may rather have served as an encouraging symbolic exemplum for the audiences who preserved and transmitted it. If this is correct, it would hardly matter whether those early audiences were heathen or Christian, and this may also be true of several other eddic poems. That is no doubt why it is so difficult for modern scholars to distinguish whether they are 'genuinely heathen' or not; if their texts could evolve over a long period and their use was not devotional anyway, it is a virtually meaningless question.

NOTES

- 1 I would like to thank Paul Bibire, Hermann Pálsson, Tom McKinnell, Margaret Clunies Ross and Jocelyn Wogan-Browne for their helpful suggestions and comments on an earlier version of this paper.
- 2 Einar Ólafur Sveinsson (1962), 282–84.
- 3 Jónas Kristjánsson (1988), 39.
- 4 Fidjestøl (1989).
- 5 de Vries (1928).

- 6 See Hallberg (1954), 56; Kvillerud (1965), 68–71; Magerøy (1958), 263.
- 7 See Magerøy (1958), 261–63.
- 8 See Magerøy (1958), 266–67.
- 9 See especially Jakobsen (1984), 75–78; but also Damico (1986), 424; Einar Ólafur Sveinsson (1962), 283–84; Hallberg (1954), 59–62; Heinrichs (1972), 507; Phillpotts (1920), 72.
- 10 This sense of *skillingar* also appears in *Magus saga jarls* (longer version), ch. 24 (ed. Bjarni Vilhjálmsón [1982], II, 240), where it is part of the description of a bizarre costume; it may be borrowed from Old English, where *scillingas* appears as a gloss for *lunulae* at Isaiah 3,18, and MS St. Gall 299 adds the footnote explanation: *lunulas quas mulieres habent de auro vel argento similitudine lunae diminutiae sic dicuntur* ‘small discs of gold or silver which women have in the shape of the waning moon are so called’ (Meritt [1945], 51).
- 11 Ed. Fulk, Bjork and Niles (2008), 42 and note on 193–94. According to *Beowulf*, Hama stole the *Brosinga mene* from the Gothic tyrant Eormenric (who according to Middle High German tradition had got his gold by killing his nephews, the Harlung brothers). The German-Latin Chronicle of Ekkehard (ca. 1100) places the fortress of the Harlungs at Breisach (*castellum nomine Brisahc*) on the Rhine. This suggests that *Brisinga men* originally meant ‘necklace of the people of Breisach’. In *Skáldskaparmál* ch. 22 (ed. Faulkes [1998], I, 32; trans Faulkes [1987], 87), Snorri quotes st. 9 of Þjóðólfr of Hvin’s *Haustlög* (ca. 900), in which Loki is called *Brísings goða girðipjófr* ‘thief of the girdle of Brísingr’s gods’ (perhaps ‘thief of the necklace made by dwarfs’), and this is usually related to the story of how Loki stole Freyja’s necklace (which is told in the legendary prose of *Sörla þáttur*, although that story does not call it the Brisingamen). Þjóðólfr may have misunderstood a version of the Harlungs’ story and assumed the Brisingar to be dwarfs because he already knew a version of the story of Freyja’s necklace; but even if Snorri was then misled by Þjóðólfr’s stanza, his use of the name *Brisingamen* for Freyja’s necklace can be paralleled only in *Þrymskviða* and in *Beowulf*.
- 12 *Gylfaginning* ch. 35, ed. Faulkes (1982), 29; trans. Faulkes (1987), 30; *Skáldskaparmál* chs. 8, 20, ed. Faulkes (1998), I, 19, 30; trans. Faulkes (1987), 76, 86; Snorri probably derives the phrase from *Þrymskviða*. Further on possible Old English influences on *Þrymskviða*, see McKinnell (2001b).
- 13 e.g. *Elene* 563b: *geþrowade* ‘he suffered’, and cf. *Dream of the Rood* 94a: *geweorðode* ‘he honoured’, see *The Vercelli Book*, ed. Krapp (1932a), 81, 64; further, see Kuhn (1939), 232–34, reprinted in Kuhn (1969–78), I, 525–26.
- 14 See essay 9 below.
- 15 See e.g. *Breta sǫgur*, in *Hauksbók*, ed. Eiríkur Jónsson and Finnur Jónsson (1892–96), 231–302 (see p. 248); this was translated from the Latin of Geoffrey of Monmouth, a Welshman who worked in Oxford and London, ca. 1129–ca. 1155 – see Thorpe, trans. (1966), 10–14; Geoffrey simply refers at this point to the wings

which King Bladud orders to be prepared for him – see ed. Griscom (1929), 262; trans. Thorpe (1966), 81.

- 16 See e.g. *Alexanders saga*, ed. Finnur Jónsson (1925), 70, 148; this prose work is derived from the verse *Alexandreis* of Walter of Chatillon (ed. Meuldener, 1863). Walter was a canon of Tournai, Belgium, was writing ca. 1180, and is thought to have died at Lille in 1201 – see Michaud, ed. (1843–65): vol. 16, p. 33. Tournai was not within the Angevin empire, but Walter had close contacts with Anjou and England – John of Salisbury tells of him relaying to England the proceedings of a colloquium at Chinon, Henry II's fortress on the Loire. See also Anglo-Scandinavian carvings like the Völundr figure on the Leeds Cross and related carvings – see Bailey (1980), 105. However, there is now also one *ffaðr-hamr* from Scandinavia itself, in the form of a recently (2011) discovered gilded bronze brooch from Uppåkra, Skåne, Sweden, which depicts a man wearing tied-on wings and bird-tail – for an illustration of this, see www.lunduniversity.lu.se/o.o.i.s/?id=24890&news_item=5895/, and for a drawing of it, see the cover of this book.
- 17 Helm (1980), 11–19.
- 18 See Cameron (1965).
- 19 For the episode in the Cupar *Banns*, see ed. Happé (1979), 442–46; 'Moder Nakett' is paid 4 d. in the unpublished Durham Cathedral Priory Bursar's Account for 1433–34, now in Durham University Library; this is the smallest sum paid to any performer in the whole run of the Durham Priory accounts, which cover about 250 years.
- 20 Háa-Póra (the giant-sized 'woman' in search of a husband) is first recorded in the mid-eighteenth century, but is thought to have come to Iceland in the medieval period after a pre-Christian origin in continental Scandinavia – see Gunnell (1995), 151–55; the ogress Grýla was known in Iceland (already in the context of violence) by 1221 (Gunnell 161); both these rituals are associated with violence or the threat of it (see Gunnell 153 for the eviction of Háa-Póra). The mock wedding at midwinter may account for twelfth-century Norwegian church laws forbidding all marriages during the Advent and Christmas seasons (Gunnell 98), and its summer equivalent in Hardanger, Western Norway, includes possibly pre-Christian elements associated with the god Ullr (Gunnell 139).
- 21 For texts of these two poems, see N-K 202–06, 234–39. On their relative dating, see Andersson (1980), 108–27; he places *Oddrúnargrátr* at the very end of a sequence of poems which seem to have built on each other. *Þrymskviða* employs two set formulae for introducing speeches; one of them is:

Oc hann þat orða allz fyrst um qvað

(*Þrymskviða* 2,1–2; 3,3–4; 9,9–10; 12,3–4)

And he spoke these words first of all

which is also used, but with the feminine pronoun, in *Oddrúnargrátr* 3,9–10. The other is a formula exemplified by:

Þá qvað (þat) Loki, Laufeyiar sonr (*Prymskviða* 18,1–2; 20,1–2)

Then Loki spoke, son of Laufey

but the speakers introduced in this way also include *Heimdallr*; *hvítastr ása* (*Prymskviða* 15,1–2); *Pórr*; *þrúðugr áss* (*Prymskviða* 17,1–2) and *Prymr*; *þursa dróttinn* (*Prymskviða* 22,1–2; 25,1–2; 30,1–2). This formula is also frequent in *Guðrúnarkviða I*, e.g.:

Þá qvað þat Gullrönd, Giúca dóttir (*Guðrúnarkviða I* 12,1–2; 17,1–2; 24,1–2)

Then Gullrönd spoke, daughter of Gjúki

and also appears with *Giaflaug*, *Giúca systir* (*Guðrúnarkviða I* 4,1–2); *Herborg*, *Hínalanz dróting* (*Guðrúnarkviða I* 6,1–2) and *Brynhildr*, *Buðla dóttir* (*Guðrúnarkviða I* 23,1–2; 25,1–2). Several other formulae are also common to these poems.

22 E.g. Arnórr jarlaskáld's *Porfinnsdrápa* 24,7–8, composed about 1065 or earlier (*Skj.* I B, 321; Kock I, 163); Steinn Herdísarson's *Ólafsdrápa* 1,1–4, composed 1066–93 (*Skj.* I B, 379; Kock I, 188).

23 *Skj.* I B, 420; Kock I, 208.

24 *Skj.* I B, 427–45; Kock I, 211–19; see also Turville-Petre (1953, 1967), 159–64; Stefán Einarsson, (1957), 69–71.

25 Meulengracht Sørensen (1983), 9–10, 23–24.

26 For this view see Magerøy (1958), 258.

27 Cf. Damico (1986), 407.

28 It has been suggested to me by Hermann Pálsson that *vergiarnasta* (*Prymskviða* 13,8) should be translated, 'most eager for a husband' rather than 'most eager for a man', and that Freyja is merely objecting to an unsuitable marriage alliance with the giants. But both of the other two instances of the feminine adjective *vergjörn* in ON verse (*Lokasenna* 17,3 and 26,3), are in contexts of strong disapproval; in the first (Íðunn embracing her brother's slayer) it is not clear whether marriage is involved or not, but lust certainly is; in the second (Frigg's adultery with Vili and Vé) the reference is to extra-marital sex. It is therefore reasonable to assume that the connotations of the word in *Prymskviða* are also sexual.

29 Foote and Wilson (1970), 112–14.

30 See Lindow (1987, 1989); Lindow (1994), 486–88.

- 31 Lindow (1994), 489; and for illustration of some examples, Turville-Petre (1964), plate 17; Ellis Davidson (1967), plate 67; Magnús Magnússon (1976), 70.
- 32 For illustrations see Kristján Eldjárn (1981), 74; Turville-Petre (1964), plate 15; Magnús Magnússon (1976), 68. *Völuspá* 8, 61 associates the game of *tqflur* with the Æsir in the golden age and after Ragnarøk (N-K 2, 14), and it is possible that the game itself may have identified the attacking pieces with the giants and the defenders with the gods; see van Hamel (1934). If so, the *hnefi* would naturally be seen as one of the gods. Other figures of this type characteristically grasp an object in front of them. At Eyrarland this is clearly hammer-shaped, but could also represent a stylized beard; in the tenth-century whalebone figure from Baldursheimur, north Iceland (see Kristján Eldjárn [1981], 83; Turville-Petre [1964], plate 14) and the bone figure from Lund, Sweden (Ellis Davidson [1967], plate 61) it might be both a pole (Gríðr's pole?) and a beard; in an amber figure now in Nationalmuseet, Copenhagen (Magnús Magnússon [1976], 68–69) and the bronze figure from Chernoi Mogili, Russia (Pushkina, [1984]) it is clearly an emphasized beard – which, of course, is also a symbol of virility. Kristján Eldjárn has argued that these miniatures may rather be examples of the *hnefi*, the ‘king’ in the game called *hneftafl* or *tqflur*; but the two interpretations are not actually incompatible with each other. Even if this was their use, they may still represent Þórr.
- 33 See Lindow (1994), 490.
- 34 SG III.i, 317 translates *stócc* (*Prymskviða* 13,5) as ‘fell off’ rather than ‘broke’, on the unduly naturalistic grounds that if the necklace had broken, Þórr could not have used it later. They also argue that the sense ‘to break’ only applies to phrasal uses of this verb, such as *stökkva í sundr*. The latter argument is circular: it assumes a sense other than ‘to break’ in every non-phrasal usage; and the former assumes a view of the Brísingamen as a solid neck-torque, which is unlikely, since *scillinga* (*Prymskviða* 32,6) probably refers to coin- or moon-shaped decorative discs (see note 10 above), and thus implies a necklace made up of separate objects threaded together on a string or wire. When applied to inanimate objects, the primary sense of *stökkva* seems to be ‘to be scattered’.
- 35 For an illustration, see Magnús Magnússon (1976), 74.
- 36 N-K 121; see also essay 9, pages 239–40.
- 37 See Frank (1986), 95–96, 107; McKinnell and Ruggerini (1994), 64–68.
- 38 See Dickins (1935), 79–80; Heinrichs (1972), 505–06; Perkins (1988), 282–83; Kvillerud (1965), 72–75, though he also considers the possibility that it is mere mechanical repetition in the manuscript.
- 39 cf. Freyja's loan of the feather-coat for Loki in *Prymskviða* 4, and the instant assumption that the hammer has reached Þórr as soon as Prymr has ordered that it be brought in, *Prymskviða* 30.
- 40 On Haa-Póra, see Gunnell (1995), 150–53; on the Lady, see Helm (1980), 105.

- 41 He is *Óðins sonr* (21,7; 32,9), *Sifjar verr* (24,9), *Hlórriði* (31,1), *hann* (31,5; 32,1).
- 42 For Freyja's cats cf. *Gylfaginning* ch. 24; ed. Faulkes (1982), 25; trans. Faulkes (1987), 24; for comment see Phillpotts (1920), 72. Jakobsen (1984), 77 suggests that this is due to influence on this stanza from *Eiríksmál* 3 (for whose text see *Skj.* I B, 165, Kock I, 89), but that verse is not about Þórr and is not obviously echoed here.
- 43 On the 'giving' and 'buying' of wives in Old French *chansons de geste*, see Kay (1995), 37–43.
- 44 Foote and Wilson (1970), 113–14.
- 45 *Íslendinga saga* ch. 10 – see *Sturlunga saga*, ed. Jón Jóhannesson, Magnús Finnbogason and Kristján Eldjárn (1946), I, 237; trans. McGrew and Thomas (1970–74), I, 126.
- 46 The mechanical mending of the necklace would be a simple matter of re-stringing the pieces of which it was made up, which might include beads and hollow metal cylinders as well as the *scillingar* mentioned in *Þrymskviða* 32,6; but in terms of the magical logic of the narrative, it could only be repaired when its narrative function ceased to defy its symbolism – cf. also the motif of the broken ring in *Völundarkviða* 19, 26–28 (see note 36 above).
- 47 Cf. Clunies Ross (1994–98), I, 109–10, who compares Þrymr's theft of the hammer to castration of Þórr.
- 48 See Meulengracht Sørensen (1983), 81–85.
- 49 See the analysis of *Gísla saga* ch. 1 in Meulengracht Sørensen (1983), 46–47; cf. *Gísla saga*, ed. Björn K. Þórólfsson and Guðni Jónsson (1943), 4–11; trans. Regal (1997), *CSI* II, 1–2. Cf. also *Alvíssmál* 4 (N-K 124), where Þórr asserts his right to decide on the marriage of an unnamed goddess or woman over whom he claims the rights of a father; further, cf. Clunies Ross (1994–98), I, 111–15; McKinnell (forthcoming).
- 50 See Jesch (1991), 168–69.
- 51 Foote and Wilson (1970), 113–14.
- 52 Cf. also *Lokasenna* 25 (N-K 101), where this may be Frigg's motive for trying (too late) to dissuade Loki and her husband Óðinn from revealing the details of each other's transvestism.
- 53 For these terms, see Krueger (1993), 24–28.
- 54 Liestøl, (1964), 41–53; the carver invokes **ioluns moþ** against the woman, which should probably be emended to *jptuns móð* 'the passion of a giant', see Lozzi Gallo (2001).
- 55 e.g. *Njáls saga* chs. 9–11, ed. Einar Ólafur Sveinsson, (1954), 30–35; trans. Cook (1997), *CSI* III, 13–15.
- 56 Similarly, Kay (1995), 36 points out with some puzzlement that in the common

chanson de geste motif of a Saracen princess who revolts against the social norm by arranging her own marriage, she is often accused by her family of being a whore, although her actual sexual behaviour is usually very modest. But this is understandable in a society where family interests took precedence over those of the individual (male or female), and where a woman's assertion of freedom of marital choice was therefore likely to be regarded as disloyalty probably motivated by lust. The *chansons de geste* poets are able to justify such women only because they are heathen princesses who convert to the True Faith when they marry Christians; the ethic of conversion overrides family objections which would probably have seemed justified to the poets and their contemporary audiences if they had been made by Christians.

- 57 Jesch (1991), 152–55; Frank (1990), 67–83, especially p. 69: ‘But when a skald addresses a woman, his “O lady” apostrophe is not so much a greeting as a kind of shorthand, a mnemonic of masculinity. When he says “O lady” he really means “Notice me. Admire me, advise me, advertise me. Look, lady, how good I am at being a man”’. This statement is perfectly true, but must be read without any of the overtones of feminist sarcasm that might now seem natural to it; since Old Norse societies distinguished strongly between male and female roles and made the validation of male courage dependent on the approval of female relatives or sexual partners, it was right and proper for male skalds to invoke the approval of a real or imagined female witness to their deeds.
- 58 See Gunnell (1995), 160–79; he shows that traditions about Grýla go back at least as far as the thirteenth century, and were probably already associated with the threat of violence.
- 59 Storr (1986), 58–59; for the terms ‘Ego’, ‘Shadow’, ‘Anima’, ‘Animus’ and ‘Persona’, see Jung (1968), 284–89.
- 60 See McKinnell and Ruggerini (1994), 34–38; it is unfortunate that Jung himself sometimes equates the Shadow with the Trickster figure (see e.g. Jung [1968], 262), since in this myth they are quite distinct entities.
- 61 The giant-name Prymr is found only in *Prymskviða* and in *Pula IV* b.2,7 (*Skj.* I B, 659; Kock I, 323), which probably derives it from the poem – though *Prymheimr*, the home of the giant Þjazi in *Grímnismál* 11,1 (N-K 59), shows an early Norse association of this element with giants, and thus renders unlikely a derivation from OE *prym* ‘strength’, ‘glory’, as e.g. in *Beowulf* line 2, (ed. Fulk, Bjork and Niles [2008], 1). It may be linked to ON *pruma* ‘to make a noise’ (see Simek [1993], 330), perhaps in its specific sense of ‘to thunder’ (and cf. the feminine noun *pruma* ‘a clap of thunder’); if early audiences of the poem were aware of this association, they may on some level have regarded Prymr as an aspect of the thunder-god Þórr, and thus have had some perception of the Shadow as a disavowed part of the protagonist himself.
- 62 Storr (1986), 50–52; cf. Jung (1968), 284: ‘I shall begin with a brief statement:

in the unconscious of every man there is hidden a feminine personality, and in that of every woman a masculine personality.' The dual nature of the Anima (or in women the Animus) as one's own 'opposite-sex personality' and as the idealised object of desire explains why the literature of romantic heterosexual love concentrates on the search for a 'soulmate', and why those who fall in love sometimes experience a sense of 'recognition' in what is actually a new relationship; further, see Jung (1968), 285–86.

- 63 Saxo's *Gesta Danorum* VIII.xiv.6 is a typical example (ed. Friis-Jensen and trans. Zeeberg [2005], I, 564–65; trans. Fisher and Ellis Davidson [1979–80], I, 263).
- 64 *Gylfaginning* ch. 27, ed. Faulkes (1982), 25; trans. Faulkes (1987), 25.
- 65 Heimdalr is called *hvítastr ása*, 'fairest of Æsir' (*Prymskviða* 15,2), and rather oddly also associated with the Vanir (*Prymskviða* 15,4); this may be taken either to suggest that he embodies both intellectual and sexual understanding (the spheres of patronage of Æsir and Vanir respectively), or that he is, like the Vanir, tainted with effeminacy (depending on whether the listener regards the advice given to Þórr as wise or foolish).
- 66 See Storr (1986), 60.
- 67 For this perception, see (among many other examples) the opening of the office of Compline: 'Brethren, be sober, be vigilant; for your adversary the Devil as a roaring lion walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.'
- 68 See Helm (1980), 13–14.
- 69 See Gunnell (1995), 153.
- 70 See e.g. Liberman (1995), especially p. 269: 'Older literature ... had not yet developed an interest in the subtler movements of the human soul.'
- 71 See e.g. Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* II, lines 694–812, ed. Windeatt (1984), 186–90.
- 72 Jung (1933), 143–74.
- 73 Jung (1968), 262. Many such figures directly threaten the audience, as is commonly done by tyrant figures in medieval Corpus Christi plays (see e.g. *Magnus Herodes*, lines 116–208, in *The Towneley Plays*, ed. Stevens and Cawley [1994], I, 186–89 and note on II, 521–22). There may, as in the cases of both Herod and Þrymr, also be an attempt to destroy or subvert the accepted foundations of human well-being (which depends on the infant Christ surviving Herod's attempt to murder him, or on the recovery of Þórr's hammer); but in modern survivals such as the traditional Caribbean carnival figure of the 'midnight robber', this cosmic significance has often been lost, leaving only the threats of extreme physical violence, which continue to entertain with an 'exorcising' mixture of nightmare and comic exaggeration.

9 *Völundarkviða*: Origins and Interpretation

Much criticism of *Völundarkviða* has tended to concentrate on investigation of the two archetypal stories on which its plot is based – that of the Other-World swan maiden who is married by a mortal man but subsequently leaves him, and that of the smith who, after being captured and maimed by an unjust king, takes vengeance by murdering his oppressor’s sons and making jewellery from their skulls, eyes and teeth, seducing the king’s daughter and leaving her pregnant, and telling the king of his revenge before flying away. Both stories are very widespread, and the study of them has been useful; but sometimes these archetypes have been used to construct arguments about what the poet of *Völundarkviða* intended which are not supportable from the text of the poem itself. An example is Lotte Motz’s tendency (Motz [1986], 61–63) to associate the swan maiden with *Boðvildr*, the king’s daughter, and thus create a genuine romantic attachment and an implied happy ending (as in the version of the story found in *Þiðreks saga*). So with real gratitude to the investigators of archetype, I want to turn back to two more traditional questions:

1. What can be said of the provenance and date of the poem?
2. What is distinctive in the way this poet tells the story?

I. Provenance and Date

The once-ferocious competing claims about the poem’s place of origin have long been in abeyance, perhaps more through exhaustion than solution. Most opinion has placed the poet in Norway, supposing that he had either an English oral source¹ or an Old Saxon one,² though Ásgeir Blöndal Magnússon (1977) has, fairly light-heartedly, suggested that the poem may have been an Icelander.

Not all of the elements which Bugge saw as Old English in origin can be accepted as such, but the following do seem significant:

1. *alvitr unga(r)* (*Völundarkviða* 1,3; 3,9; 10,7).³ In Old Norse verse the word *alvitr* occurs only here and at *Helgakviða Hundingsbana II* 26,2, where it is used of a valkyrie and may be derived from the use here. In the prose introduction to *Völundarkviða* it is misunderstood as a proper name, though the thirteenth-century editor does call the swan maidens valkyries. The corresponding Old English word *ælwihtr* only appears in *Beowulf* 1500, where it means 'alien creatures' and refers to the monsters swimming in Grendel's mere;⁴ but the form of the second element of *alvitr* corresponds to OE *wihtr* rather than ON *vættr*, and consequently the prose editor took it to mean 'All-wise' and interpreted it as a proper name. No cognate word survives in Old Saxon.
2. *ørlog drýgia* (*Völundarkviða* 1,4; 3,10). Both words are common separately in Old Norse, but the whole phrase is paralleled only in the OE *Judgement Day I* 29: *orleg dreogeð*, where it is used of a soul in Hell and must mean 'undergoes his fate' rather than 'experiences battle'.⁵ OS *orlegas* means 'battle' at *Heliand* 3697, but the sense 'fate' must also have existed in Old Saxon, since *orlaghuīle* (*Heliand* 3355) means 'fated time (of death)'.⁶ The phrase as a whole does not appear in Old Saxon.
3. *við gimfastan* (*Völundarkviða* 5,4). In skaldic verse, the simplex *gim* has the meaning 'fire' (it appears twice with that literal meaning, three times in kennings for 'gold' and three times in kennings for 'sword');⁷ if we took *gimfastan* as two words, as the metre seems to require, the meaning 'he hammered the red gold firmly against the fire' might be possible here, though it would hardly describe what a goldsmith actually does and it would be the only non-skaldic instance of the word.⁸ However, most commentators have taken it as an otherwise unrecorded variant of *gimsteinn* 'jewel' (itself probably a loan from Old English), in which case it may have been misunderstood by the scribe, who made of it *gimfastan*, a single word which makes no obvious sense and produces a line with only one stressed syllable. In OE, *gim* is the usual word for 'jewel', and occurs in a number of contexts comparable to the gold rings being described here, e.g. *Gim sceal on hringe standan* (*Maxims II* 22–23),⁹ *gold and gim* (*Vespasian Psalter* 118, 127).¹⁰ The phrase can then be translated 'round the firmly-held gem' and scanned as a C-Type half-line (Type 2C1, Bliss [1962], 31). The word *gim* does not appear in Old Saxon.

4. *bast* (Völundarkviða 7,5), and possibly *bestisíma* (st. 12,3), where the manuscript form *bestibysíma* is meaningless. *Bast* is not found elsewhere in Old Norse verse with the sense ‘rope’, but cf. OE *Judges* 15,13, where Samson is bound *mid twam bestenum rapum*.¹¹ The other word-element used for ‘rope’ in Völundarkviða is *lind-*, in the compound *lindbauga* (5,6); *lind-* does not normally mean ‘rope’ in either Old English or Old Norse, and comparison is usually made with ON *lindi* ‘belt’, but cf. the OE *Epinal-Erfurt Glossary* 1017, where Latin *tilio*, ‘lime tree’, is glossed *bæst vel lind*.¹² This suggests that OE *bæst* and *lind* could be regarded as synonyms, as they must be in Völundarkviða, where all these instances refer to the bast-rope on which Völundr’s rings are threaded. Neither word appears in Old Saxon.
5. *álfa ljóði* (Völundarkviða 10,3). *Ljóði* is not found elsewhere in Old Norse, and is commonly explained as being derived from *lýðr*, ‘people’, and meaning ‘leader’, although this is merely a conjecture. But the exactly comparable OE *leoda* means ‘citizen’, while the plural *leodan* means ‘people’.¹³ In OS the plural form *liudi*, ‘people’ is common,¹⁴ but I have not found the word in the singular. The only parallel to the singular form, therefore, is in Old English, and it suggests that *álfa ljóði* means ‘citizen of the elves’, or simply ‘elf’; other evidence that Völundr was regarded as an elf also comes only from England, see no. 6 below.
6. *vísi álfa* (Völundarkviða 13,4). This phrase is clearly related to the previous one, and has usually been translated in the same way, though de Vries (1952), 189 argues for derivation from an unrecorded OS phrase meaning ‘wise elf’. There is no evidence to support this Old Saxon connection, but with the alliteration Völundr: *vísi* in this line cf. the OE *Metres of Boethius* 10,33:

Hwær sint nu þæs wisan Welandes ban?

(and see also lines 35, 42, where the alliterating phrase is repeated).¹⁵ Here, the usual translation has been ‘Where now are the bones of Weland the Wise?’; but *wisan* here could be either the weak masculine genitive singular of *wis*, ‘wise’ or the genitive singular of the weak noun *wisa*, ‘leader’. The Old Norse phrase is equally ambiguous, and could mean either ‘wise one of the elves’ or ‘leader of elves’; at all events, it would seem sensible to interpret the phrase in the same way in both languages. If the meaning is taken to be ‘wise’, no evidence remains in the poem (as opposed to the prose of the thirteenth-century Icelandic editor) that Völundr is a king or

aristocrat of any kind (unless we take his white neck as an indication of this, see below).

What is unavoidable, however, is the tradition that Völundr is of elvish origin, and this is elsewhere found only in Middle English, in *Lazamon's Brut* 10,544–45,¹⁶ where Arthur's mail-shirt has been made by an elvish smith called Wygar, father of Widia; the son's name shows that the father was once Weland, the traditional father of Widia (see e.g. *Waldere* II, 4, 9).¹⁷

7. *naudir* (Völundarkviða 11,6), used with the sense 'restraints' (or possibly 'fetters') is found in Old Norse only here and in *Sigrdrífumál* 1, where it must mean 'fetters'; but if the meaning in Völundarkviða is 'restraints', the sense 'fetters' is unsupported elsewhere and may derive from a misunderstanding of Völundarkviða. The sense here has been debated,¹⁸ but is apparently the same as in OE *Deor* 5–6:

Sippan hine Niðhad on nede
legde
swoncre seonobende on syllan
monn.

After Niðhad placed restraints on him,
supple bonds made of sinews on a
better man.

where the reference is to the same incident in the Weland/Völundr story. OS *niud* appears only in the sense 'necessity', e.g. *Heliand* 182.¹⁹

8. *iarnasteina* (Völundarkviða 25,2; 35,6). This word appears in Old Norse verse only here and in *Guðrúnarkviða I* 18 and *Guðrúnarkviða III* 9, in both of which it is used for a rich and exotic jewel; both may be derived from Völundarkviða. OE *eorcnanstan* appears in *Elene* 1024²⁰ and five other instances, in one of which, *Psalm Gloss C* 118, 127,²¹ it glosses Latin *topazion* (at the same point where the Vespasian Psalter uses *gim*, see no. 3 above). The word does not appear in Old Saxon.
9. *um sofnaði* (Völundarkviða 28,4). This metrical type of single-stress half-line (Bliss's d1, in instances consisting of a single prefixed weak verb in the past tense) is found in eddic verse only here and in *Prymskviða* 1, but is not uncommon in OE verse,²² cf. *Beowulf* 2619, *Dream of the Rood* 94, and seventeen instances in Cynewulf's poems, e.g. *Elene* 563.²³ Further on the importance of this point, see below.
10. *barni aukin* (Völundarkviða 36,6). *Aukin* is not found elsewhere in Old Norse verse in the sense 'pregnant', but this meaning is common in Old English, cf. especially *Deor* 11, referring to this story; see also *Christ* 38,²⁴ etc. OS *ocan* is rare in the sense 'pregnant', but appears at *Heliand* 193.²⁵

11. *níta* (Völundarkviða 37,4) has not been satisfactorily explained, but could be a variant of ON *njóta* influenced by OE *nyttian*, *nittian*, ‘to possess, experience, have the use of’.²⁶

Some of this evidence seems strong, while other parts of it are uncertain, but taken as a whole it amounts to a strong case for English influence on the vocabulary and (in one instance) the metre of Völundarkviða. In theory, this might be accounted for by any one of four explanations:

1. Translation from an English source.
2. Use of English vocabulary by a Scandinavian poet to give an impression of the exotic.
3. Composition in a dialect area where ON was influenced by OE.
4. Composition in Scandinavia by a native speaker of OE.

The last seems least likely, particularly since composition in a language which is not one’s own is more difficult in verse than in prose. The use of English to give a flavour of the exotic seems a more attractive possibility; it might be analogous to the deliberate use of Norse words in Old English poems, like *cneor* (cf. ON *knorr* ‘cargo ship’) in *The Battle of Brunanburh* 35 and *dreng* (cf. ON *drengr* ‘man’, ‘warrior’) in *The Battle of Maldon* 149.²⁷ But two things tell against it as applied to Völundarkviða:

1. If it were the case, we should expect the English-influenced vocabulary to be used selectively. It might give a suitable air of mystery to the swan maidens and to Völundr’s elvish origins, perhaps also to the jewellery, but it would hardly seem appropriate to apply it to a rope, a girl falling asleep before being seduced, or her unwanted pregnancy.
2. If this was the intention, the poet has failed to avoid the danger of being misunderstood by Scandinavian audiences, for several instances of Old English influence have led to misunderstanding by the prose editor or the scribes (*alvitr*, *gim*, *bestisíma*, and possibly *nauðir*, *íviðgjarnra* (see below) and *níta*).

We could only maintain this view, therefore, if we also thought that the poet was in some respects incompetent, and every poem is entitled to the most favourable interpretation that the evidence will support.

This leaves two serious possibilities. But there are three grounds for thinking that Völundarkviða is not a direct translation from an Old English source:

1. Considering the close relationship between the two languages, there is a surprisingly large proportion of couplets (42 out of 158, or 27 per cent) whose alliteration cannot be derived from Old English, either because it lacks the cognate words to support the alliteration (14 cases), or because the Old English cognate word has a different and unsuitable sense or usage (12 cases), or would not alliterate (4 cases), or because the alliteration would breach the rules of grammatical preference in Old English (12 cases). And this is without considering lines which would not scan at all if translated back into Old English.

It is difficult to find comparable examples of poetry translated from one early Germanic language into another, but one undoubted example is the short passage of the OE *Genesis B* whose Old Saxon original survives.²⁸ This has 26 lines, of which 20 have all alliterating words directly derived from the OS source; five have the same alliterating sound but with one of the two or three alliterating stress-words altered (but one of these, *Genesis B* 809, where OE *forst* stands for OS *forð*, may be a scribal error in either manuscript). One OE line has no OS original, but no OS line is omitted from the OE. The proportion of alliteration which is the same is therefore about 86 per cent. Admittedly, this passage is very short, but it does suggest that if *Völundarkviða* is a translation, its poet must have treated his original with much greater freedom than did the OE *Genesis B* translator. And if that is so, it is strange that he has retained several words which his audience were likely to misunderstand.

2. Two of the points at which Old English influence is most prominent could not be translated back into equally satisfactory OE verse:
 - a) The phrase *alvitr unga(r)* (stt. 1,3; 3,9; 10,7). In OE this would be **ælwihte geonge*, where the two words would not alliterate with each other. The alliteration of the whole line would still stand in each case, but it would be odd for an Old English poet to compose a repeated phrase which alliterated better in Old Norse than in his own language, and equally odd for a Norwegian to invent one which is important to the understanding of the swan maidens episode but which his audience were unlikely to understand (as the prose editor does, treating *alvitr* as a personal name). It is only for a poet composing in a form of Norse influenced by Old English that such a phrase would be natural.
 - b) Even clearer is the half-line *um sofnadī* (st. 28,4). As Kuhn points out (1939, 232–34), this type of half-line, made up of a single prefixed verb, is distinctively Old English. But the poet of *Völundarkviða* cannot have derived it from an Old English original, because the OE verb *swefan*, ‘to fall asleep’ is strong, and unlike *swebban*, ‘to put to sleep’,

it never appears with a prefix; the exactly cognate OE verb *swefnian* means 'to dream', which is not an appropriate sense here. If rendered back into Old English, therefore, this half-line would become the single syllable *swæf*, which could not form a half-line by itself. The typically English metrical pattern here must therefore be due to the Norse poet himself, not to any OE source, and this strongly suggests a poet who was composing in Old Norse but was influenced by English metrical practice.

3. Finally, at least one of the later misunderstandings of Old English-influenced words (*alvitr*; and possibly also *vísi álfa* and *níta*) results not from the absence of a comparable Norse word but from the fact that the form used approximates to the Old English one. The poet could have used the familiar second element *vætr* (and the forms *viti álfa* and *njóta*, if that is what he meant). The fact that he did not do so suggests that the linguistic forms of his own speech were probably influenced by English, like his metrical practice – and this was only likely to happen in an area of England where Norse was spoken.

But if the poem comes from England, how do we account for the German influence on it? This certainly exists, and has even led scholars like de Vries and Schröder to assert that the poet was a Norwegian working from an Old Saxon source. The major German elements are:

1. Several of the proper names: certainly *Hlōðvér*, *Níðuðr* and *Þakkráðr*, perhaps also *Njárar*, *Bōðvildr* and even *Völundr* itself.²⁹ But names are easily transferable from one language to another, and while this probably does suggest that the story first assumed something like its present form in a German, perhaps Old Saxon speaking area, it tells us nothing about the immediate origins of *Völundarkviða* itself.
2. The verb form *dró* (past tense of *draga*) in the sense 'wore' (*Völundarkviða* 2,6) reflects the usual German sense, but cannot be paralleled in either OE or ON, except in translations from Middle Low German, such as *Þiðreks saga*, from which an instance is cited by Jón Helgason (1962), 56–57. This does suggest a fairly recent German source, at least for the swan maidens episode.

Four other claimed instances of Old Saxon influence seem more doubtful:

3. *íviðgiarnra* (*Völundarkviða* 28,8, MS *ívið giarira*). The word is unique in ON, which shows no similar compounds; it is therefore probably due to

the influence of another Germanic language. It has been compared with OS *inuideas gern* 'eager for malice',³⁰ but this shows a genitive ending to the first element, so is not strictly comparable. There are also some OS *inuuid-* compounds without the genitive, but all of these are with nouns; they are *inuuidnîð* (*Heliand* 4924), *inuuidrâdo* (*Heliand* 3373), *inuuidrâdos* (*Heliand* 1755), *inuuidsprâca* (*Heliand* 5333).³¹ But OE also shows a number of *inwit-* compounds without the genitive ending, including the adjective-compound *inwitful* (*Genesis A* 1273³² and thirteen other instances). If anything, the Old English parallel looks closer here, although the absence of adjectival *inuuid-* compounds in OS could be due to the smaller surviving corpus in that language; this influence might come from either language.

4. *vel ek* (*Völundarkviða* 29,1) has been related to an alleged German *wola du* (see Jón Helgason [1962], 74), and is hard to parallel convincingly in ON. But in all the OS instances I have found, *uuola* is used absolutely, without a pronoun.³³ OE *wel me!* is therefore as close to the expression here as the OS parallels.³⁴ Admittedly, the closest OE examples are in prose, but this sort of exclamation is rare in poetry, and the absence of other comparable expressions in ON verse may also be a reflection of this.
5. De Vries (1952), 192 suggests that the phrase *tenn hánúm teygíaz* (*Völundarkviða* 17,1) should be translated 'he shows his teeth', and cites OS *tôgean*, 'to show',³⁵ while ON *teygja*, 'to stretch out', seems to give poor sense. But OE *tēon forð* also appears with the sense 'to display',³⁶ and in defence of the traditional translation 'he snaps with his teeth', one could cite the parallel of OE *togung* (f.), 'a violent spasm'.³⁷
6. De Vries also argues ([1952], 196–97) that *fitjar*, in the phrase *á fitjum* (st. 29,2) should not be translated '(webbed) feet' or 'soles of the feet', as e.g. in *LP* and Jón Helgason (1962), 74, but rather 'wings', derived from OS *federac* and related to Middle Low German *vittek*. However, this interpretation creates more problems than it solves; it would imply that Níðuðr's men had deprived Völundr of a pair of wings which he already possessed. This would conflict with the story told in *Piðreks saga*³⁸ and depicted on the Franks Casket, in which Velent makes his flying apparatus after he has been maimed by the king; it has no support in any source, and it would mean that Völundr must regain these wings in a way which the poet omits to mention. In any case, a parallel could as easily be drawn with OE *fiðeru* (e.g. *Paris Psalter* 67, 13)³⁹ as with OS *federac*. In fact, there is no need to reject the usual interpretation here: *fit(jar)* is used of an eagle's claws in Þorleifr jarlsskáld's late-tenth-century *lausavísa* 2,6 (*Skj.* I B, 133; Kock I, 73), and of men's limbs (specifically arms) in Snorri's *Háttatal*

42.⁴⁰ If it carried literal or metaphorical associations with the claws of a bird, its use here is poetically appropriate, since Völundr is about to fly.

It seems, therefore, that there is some German (probably Old Saxon) influence on the language of the poem, but the extent of that influence may have been exaggerated, and there is no reason why it should not have been exerted on a poet in England by an Old Saxon source. Indeed, this is one of the few explanations which can explain the mixture of Old English and Old Saxon linguistic features in the poem. Some version of the story probably was known in Germany at an early date. A gold *solidus* found at Schweindorf, Ostfriesland, North Germany (late sixth or early seventh century) probably reads (from right to left) **weladu**,⁴¹ which may represent the name *Weland*. From about the same period, a silver belt-buckle from a male grave at Pforzen in Bavaria carries the inscription:

aigil andi ailrun (aai)⁴²

Itahu gasokun

This has been interpreted in a wide variety of different ways,⁴³ but clearly contains a line of verse and names two people whose names correspond to ON *Egill* and *Qlriún*. This suggests that the swan-maidens story may have been popular in Germany in the late sixth century.⁴⁴

The obvious next question is why, if the matter is as simple as I have suggested, Sophus Bugge should have concluded in 1910 that the poem emanates from northern Norway. To some extent, he seems to have been influenced by details in the prose introduction, but when these are removed, three arguments remain:

1. The name *Slagfiðr*, probably meaning ‘the Lapp who strikes (with a hammer)’, suggested to Bugge that the poet knew that the Sámi were renowned for magic and as smiths, that they were skiers and hunters, and that their neighbours extorted wealth from them by way of tribute. But this story presents a traditional poetic image, not personal knowledge. Bugge himself demonstrates the link between *døkkálfar* (‘dark elves’) and dwarfs, and points out that *Álfr* and *Finnr* are both dwarf names (e.g. *Völuspá* 16,1 and 16,4), so there is nothing strange about linking the elf-smith with dwarfs, and hence with the name-element *Finnr* (‘Lapp’). Further, the Sámi attributes of magic, travel on skis or snowshoes, and paying of tribute are all to be found casually referred to in tenth- and early eleventh-century skaldic verse: for magic, see *fjólkunnigra Finna*;⁴⁵ for skiing or snowshoes, *erum á leið frá láði / liðnir Finnum skriðnu* (‘we have come to sea from the land

where Lapps go on skis’);⁴⁶ for tribute paying, *Finna gjöld*.⁴⁷ Knowledge of the Sámi as hunters and tribute payers had existed in England since the time of Alfred (King of Wessex, died 899).⁴⁸

Two other details support the view that this is poetic tradition rather than personal knowledge. One, which troubles Bugge considerably, is that Völundr is said to have a white neck (*Völundarkviða* 2,9–10), whereas real Sámi are swarthy; in fact, his fair skin is probably an indication of noble birth (cf. *háls hvítari* describing Móðir, the noblewoman in *Rígsþula* 29). The other is the curious coincidence that the OE *Widsið* twice links the tribal name *Finnas* in the same line with *Casere*, the ‘Cæsar’ who corresponds to Kjarr, the father-in-law of Völundr and his brothers in *Völundarkviða*.⁴⁹ This might suggest that they were already linked in a story known in England by the early tenth century.

2. Secondly, Bugge argues that the geography of the poem, with a remote lake and a fire made of fir-wood and kindled with twigs points to northern Norway. But this is pure romantic imagination; lakes, twigs and fir trees are not confined to northern Norway, and even if they were, others might compose about them. Björn Magnússon Olsen rightly points out ([1894], 38–39) that Icelandic poets have never been inhibited from mentioning trees by the fact that Iceland has so few of them, or even by their lack of accurate knowledge about them.
3. Finally, Bugge argues that the wildlife portrayed in the poem also points to the far north of Norway. He is thinking chiefly of the swan maidens, who fly from the south and alight on the strand just as whooper swans nest for the summer on the edges of remote lakes in northern Norway; but he also mentions the bear hunting implied in *Völundarkviða* 9 and the place-name *Úlfadalir* (‘Wolf Dales’). But this is the stuff of romantic nationalism. The swan maidens come from the south because they are exotic and rich (*drósir suðrænar*, *Völundarkviða* 1,7), and the daughters of a possibly Merovingian emperor *Hlǫðvér* (st. 15), and they depart again because the ancient archetype demanded that they should, not because the poet is allegorising the flight of migrating swans. And even if he were, he does not say they were whooper swans; mute swans are part resident, part migratory throughout Northern Europe, and winter as far south as Greece.⁵⁰

Wolves and bears are, of course, commonplace literary animals in all Germanic verse traditions; and in this case, the eating of the she-bear’s flesh may be an instance of the belief that one acquired part of the strength, courage and cunning of a ferocious animal by eating its flesh (cf. *Brot af Sigurðarkviðu* 4), as

well as forming part of the imagery surrounding Völundr as both hunter and hunted in this part of the poem.

As soon as one looks at it closely, the evidence for northern Norwegian origin for the poem melts away. Still less is there any objective reason to localise it in Iceland; Björn Magnússon Olsen produced no concrete evidence in favour of this for *Völundarkviða* (as opposed to his general argument that nearly all eddic poetry is Icelandic). The tentative suggestion of Icelandic origin made by Ásgeir Blöndal Magnússon is based entirely on comparisons with rare words in modern Icelandic, of which the most interesting is *ǫgurstund* (41,5), which appears in a variety of local usages in Icelandic, all connected with brevity and the state of the tide. But OE *egor* also means 'tide' or 'high tide'.⁵¹ If this sense were assumed here, Bǫðvildr might be speaking both literally and figuratively; *ǫgurstund* might have the sense 'a fleeting interval of time' suggested by modern Icelandic usage, and also mean that she had been literally trapped on the island with Völundr (*í hólmi*, 40,4 and 41,4) while the causeway linking it to the mainland was covered for the space of one high tide. This may therefore be another instance of Old English influence on the poem's vocabulary, and from there into modern Icelandic. Even if this idea is rejected, the existence of OE *egor* shows that this word must once have been known beyond Iceland, and so it provides no evidence for an Icelandic origin for the poem. Indeed, to do Ásgeir justice, his article succeeds admirably in elucidating the word *ǫgurstund*, and it is not really part of his purpose to argue about the poem's place of origin.

We are left with the conclusion that the poem probably originates from a Norse-influenced area of England, in a form which must have resembled the preserved one at least to a considerable extent, since the text we have preserved a number of Anglicisms that the scribe and prose editor did not understand. The main consequence of this is that, since Norse was spoken in England for a relatively short time, it gives us some hope of an approximate dating. The poem cannot have been composed before English linguistic influence on the language spoken by the Viking colonists had become considerable – say a generation or so after the first major settlements – and this probably rules out a date before ca. 900. A later limit is hard to establish, because as Page (1971) has shown, the question of how long the Norse language survived in England is difficult to answer; the epigraphic evidence is thin and often ambiguous or difficult to date. So far as it goes, it suggests that Old Norse did not survive long in the southern Danelaw or the Five Boroughs. In East Anglia and Lincolnshire, even those objects whose decoration or rune-forms are strongly Scandinavian-influenced (the Sutton brooch, the Crowle stone) or which include personal names of Scandinavian origin (the Lincoln stone) usually show

no Norse influence on the language of their inscriptions. There are two brief Scandinavian inscriptions from Lincoln, but both are on small portable objects (a comb-case made of antler, probably from the tenth century, and an undatable fragment of cattle-rib). It is difficult to decide whether these objects originated in Lincoln or not, and even if they did, they do not provide any evidence that Norse was spoken there after the tenth century.⁵²

In Yorkshire, Norse was undoubtedly spoken for a time, but the two probably Norse inscriptions (Skelton in Cleveland and Settle, North Yorkshire) cannot be reliably dated.⁵³ Some monuments dating from the tenth or eleventh centuries are unaffected by Norse language (Great Edstone, Castlegate York, and the undated Collingham stone), but in an area with a mixed population this was to be expected. Two inscriptions which certainly or probably date from the reign of Edward the Confessor (1042–65) (the Aldbrough stone and the Kirkdale sundial) include Norse personal names and are written in a form of English showing strong Norse influence. These suggest that Norse speech had probably died out in most of Yorkshire by the mid-eleventh century, at least at the social levels that were likely to commission inscriptions (or, presumably, poems).⁵⁴ In Cumbria, Norse speech is vouched for until ca. 1100 by the inscription in Carlisle Cathedral, but the mixed speech of the Pennington tympanum and the English of the Bridekirk font suggest that it did not survive much later than that, and Page (1971), 174 suggests that this evidence may be influenced by a new influx of Norse speakers from such areas as the Isle of Man.⁵⁵

If *Völundarkviða* was composed in England, therefore, it was probably in Lincolnshire, Yorkshire or Cumbria. But iconographic evidence points towards Yorkshire, where at least four stones show an iconographic scheme that probably depicts *Völundr*.⁵⁶ There are also two doubtful cases: the figure on a small stone fragment from York Minster (York Minster 9, face A) looks more like an angel than a *Völundr* figure;⁵⁷ while just over the border into Cumbria, the so-called ‘bound devil’ at Kirby Stephen might be an incompetent imitation of the motif, but lacks the female figure, and the usual tied-on wings seem to have been misinterpreted as horns.⁵⁸

The design common to the other four sculptures, in Leeds parish church (Leeds 1C), Leeds Museum (Leeds 2C), and at Sherburn (East Riding, Sherburn 2A, 3A) and Bedale (North Riding, Bedale 6A) depicts a man tied to a set of wings and a bird tail (and at Sherburn with a head and beak as well), surrounded by smith’s tools (Leeds Cross, Leeds Museum only) whose hands, stretched above his head, grasp the hair and dress of a woman, who seems to be holding something, probably circular (Leeds Cross only).⁵⁹ This design, which is damaged in all four cases, does not include the headless bodies of

Níðuðr's sons, but it is otherwise similar to that found on Ardre Stone VIII in Gotland.⁶⁰ (Ardre, incidentally, is the only undoubted instance of the Völundr story on a Scandinavian picture stone,⁶¹ and it is too early to be influenced by *Völundarkviða* and probably too distant to be an immediate influence on it.) No one can deny that the Völundr story was known in Scandinavia by the tenth century, even if *Völundarkviða* was composed in England, since the story is vouched for by a handful of kennings in skaldic verse. For knowledge of Egill as an archer, see the arrow-kennings *hlaupsildr Egils gaupna*, 'leaping herring of Egill's hands'⁶² and *hryngráp Egils vápna*, 'falling hail of Egill's weapons';⁶³ for knowledge of Níðuðr, see the giant-kennings *grjót-Níðaðr*.⁶⁴ The word *völundar* also appears as a plural common noun meaning 'craftsmen' (specifically 'weavers') in *Hamðismál* 7,3. But the motif on the Yorkshire stones does seem to show that there was some interest in Völundr in Yorkshire in the tenth and early eleventh centuries, although I cannot suggest what the statement intended by these carvers might be. And it is in the Yorkshire of the tenth or early eleventh century that I would tentatively place the origin of the poem we have, or at least an important part of its form and language.

II. The Shaping of the Received Legend

I would like to turn now to the question of what is distinctive in the way the poet handles the story. It is of course useful to know as much as possible about the ancient archetypes which underlie the poem, but to study these is not to study the poem itself; it is the role of the historical anthropologist rather than the literary historian, and to confuse the two helps neither type of study. For example, Lotte Motz (1986), 55 argues that the final 'happy ending' in which Völundr marries the king's daughter, as in *Piðreks saga*,⁶⁵ is an original part of the legend, and that Bǫðvildr acquires some of the characteristics of the swan-maiden bride whom Völundr has lost at the beginning of the story. Her grounds for this argument are that the swan-maidens legend is typically an ancestor myth, whereas the vengeful smith usually has no descendants. Bǫðvildr's son Viðga is a legendary ancestor (probably the Gothic hero Vidigoia named by Jordanes in his *Gothic History*);⁶⁶ therefore the story of Bǫðvildr must show influence from that of the swan maidens.

This argument from the archetype seems to me to be dubious. No surviving version of the legend equates Bǫðvildr with the swan-maiden bride, and we cannot assume a feature which is not in any version of the story merely to force the legend into perfect accordance with the archetype. Comparative mythologists can never be experts in all the languages and literatures they use, and if

everyone started emending stories in accordance with supposed stereotypes, then the basis on which those stereotypes are founded would itself become unreliable, since it would be based on circular reasoning. And as regards *Völundarkviða* itself, such argument is valueless, for in this poem it is quite clear that the swan bride and Bǫðvildr are not the same woman, that Bǫðvildr becomes the mother of a son while the swan bride does not, and that the ancestor myth is in any case not what the poet is interested in.

What, then, was in the traditions received by the poet, and what has he chosen to alter? (Since the poem is characterised by an evident mistrust of the power of women, it seems likely that the poet was a man.) He probably did not invent the connection between the swan maidens story and that of the vengeful smith, for the same connection is implicit in the versions of the German romance *Friedrich von Schwaben* which also call the hero Wieland,⁶⁷ and possibly also in the association of the names *Aigil* and *Ailrun* on the Pforzen buckle (see above). But there are two respects in which the story apparently depicted on the Franks Casket⁶⁸ agrees with *Piðreks saga* against *Völundarkviða*:

1. *Völundarkviða* inherits a version of the story in which Völundr had at least one brother (Egill) and possibly two, but chooses to get them out of the way early in the story by sending them off in search of their swan brides. In *Piðreks saga*, Egill continues to play an important part in the story, catching the birds from which Velent (Völundr) makes the wings he will fly away with, and being forced to shoot at him as he makes his escape.⁶⁹ The Franks Casket also depicts a man catching birds behind the smith, and (in a version now obscure but apparently different from *Piðreks saga*) shows Egill as an archer defending a house against attacking warriors. Whatever the detailed meaning of this scene, it seems likely that Egill usually had a larger part in the story than the poet of *Völundarkviða* has allowed him, rather than that the Franks Casket and *Piðreks saga* have independently expanded his role.⁷⁰
2. *Völundarkviða* omits the maidservant who in *Piðreks saga* and (probably) on the Franks Casket accompanies Bǫðvildr when she brings her broken ring to Völundr and asks him to mend it.⁷¹ Souers has suggested (Souers [1943], 106–09) that the maidservant may have been added by the author of *Piðreks saga*, and that the second female figure on the Franks Casket panel is another representation of Bǫðvildr, sent by Völundr to fetch the drink which he will use in seducing her during her second visit. This is possible, but involves assuming the existence of a motif (Völundr sending Bǫðvildr to fetch the drink) which is not found in any source, and which therefore seems unlikely. The omission of the maidservant from *Völundarkviða* may rather have been to avoid awkward questions about why she neither

prevented the seduction of Bǫðvildr nor warned Níðuðr about it, but it also carries implications for Bǫðvildr's own characterisation.

We cannot know whether the author of *Völundarkviða* or his source was responsible for these changes, but they remain significant for the way the story is told.

Some other aspects of the story must be attributed to the poet rather than the source, and three of these seem particularly important:

1. The suppression of the dynastic element in the story.
2. The importance given to female characters.
3. The attempt to assert exact poetic justice.

It is clear that the poet knows about Völundr's son Viðga and expects his audience to know about him, since Völundr refers to the possibility of a son when he forces Níðuðr to swear that he will not kill his 'bride' (*Völundarkviða* 33,9–10). In any case, *Deor*, which clearly has some textual relationship to *Völundarkviða*, uses the story of Beadohild (Bǫðvildr) as an example of sorrow transcended (presumably when her son became a great hero). This story was probably widely known in England: *Waldere* refers to Widia as both *Niðhades mæg* and *Welandes bearn* without further explanation.⁷² But our poet allows Bǫðvildr no consolation, and despite knowing about Viðga, is not in the least concerned with him, whether as ancestor, consolation or anything else. In this respect, the spirit of *Völundarkviða* is quite different from that of *Deor*, and probably represents innovation by this poet.

One of the most interesting aspects of the poem is the importance given to female characters. The swan maiden's importance is brought out by a series of references to her and her sisters throughout the first half of the poem. Throughout stanzas 1–3, the emphasis is firmly on them rather than their husbands. In st. 1 we see them settling on the shore as they do it, not as the men discover them. In st. 2 the women take the initiative in the marriages, and this must have been very striking to the poem's first audience because it was unfamiliar in their own society.⁷³ And in st. 3 the swan women are possessed by an unspecified yearning, and the parting is due to an unexplained compulsion within them, in which their husbands have no share and about which they are apparently neither consulted nor enlightened.

This is all very different from the usual form of the swan maiden archetype, in which it is the human man who initiates the marriage, often compelling it by stealing the woman's swan-skin, as the Wielant figure does in *Friedrich von Schwaben* 4389–4641 (ed. Jellinek [1904], 67–71). In that form of the story, the woman's departure is understandable, sometimes even a laudable escape

(see Hatto [1961], 333–34), whereas here it seems like arbitrary caprice, or more probably obedience to natural laws that remain inscrutable to human beings. It is, however, possible that the mysterious force that drags the swan-maidens away from their husbands may have been a received part of the story, since one interpretation of the inscription on the Pforzen buckle would include it (see above).

There is, however, another kind of story in which a woman from the other world, often a queen or princess, does take the initiative in wooing a mortal man. She is generally called the *fée* (*Hrólfs saga kraka* calls her an *álfkona*); Marie de France's *Lanval* is a well-known example.⁷⁴ A related *lai* which is closer to the *Völundr* story is *Graelent*, but this includes the episode in which the hero steals the bird-skins of the women, and thus makes him take the initiative; Schofield has even suggested that it may have been influenced by a *Völundr* story like that in *Friedrich von Schwaben*, but Cross shows that it is unnecessary to suppose this.⁷⁵ Other stories of the same kind can be seen in *Hrólfs saga kraka*, *Gibbons saga* and elsewhere.⁷⁶ As most examples of this story-pattern in Old Norse seem to derive from romance tradition, to which it came chiefly from Celtic sources, there may be some doubt about whether Norse speakers in tenth- or eleventh-century Northumbria would have been familiar with it; but Scandinavian links with the Celtic areas of the British Isles, especially Ireland, were so strong that such knowledge cannot be considered unlikely.

This kind of encounter sometimes resembles the one in *Völundarkviða* in that it takes place in a remote natural place, and also in that the human hero is temporarily abandoned by the *fée* later in the story. But the *fée* usually imposes a tabu on the hero, which he fails to observe, and this explains her abandonment of him, his subsequent misfortunes or both. Here *Völundarkviða* does not conform to the pattern, for the swan women place no tabu on their husbands, nor do the husbands do anything which might drive them away. The abandonment remains completely arbitrary.

Having lost the other-world wife, what should the hero do? Egill and Slagfiör immediately depart, in different directions, to search for their mates (*Völundarkviða* 4), and this is what the husband in the swan maiden story often does.⁷⁷ But we hear no more of them, and searching for an other-worldly woman by wide journeying in this world is clearly the wrong way to go about it. Admittedly, such heroes as Orfeo and Yvain do regain their partners by journeying, but these stories normally involve aimless wandering rather than a purposeful search, and a retreat into uninhabited wilderness rather than travel among different lands in the world of men; in the latter respect, they resemble the solitude of *Völundr* in *Úlfdalir* rather than the behaviour of his brothers.

Anyway, we have here a story of three brothers, and we all know (and have known ever since we had *The Three Little Pigs* read to us as children) that it is always the youngest brother, or the last mentioned, who adopts the right course of action. Staying put in such a situation is also more sensible in terms of this relationship; the human will not be able to find his supra-human mate against her will, and as the marriage was initiated and ended by her, it is only by her return, whether voluntary or compelled by magic, that it may begin again. That is probably why Völundr spends his time perfecting rings, whose completion seems to function as a symbol of female sexuality, as well as creating the idea of a chain magically binding the characters to each other; and there is an apparent 'rightness' about this behaviour.

To this, however, one might add one qualification. If the forging of rings is a kind of magic by which the smith can induce or compel a woman to come to him, the story partakes of another folktale irony: such magicians need not only power, but also the wisdom to phrase their demands exactly. Just as the Wife of Usher's Well is able to compel the return of her dead sons by means of a curse on the weather, but forgets to stipulate that they must remain with her,⁷⁸ so Völundr embarks on the ring-magic which will bring him a mate without, apparently, considering that the woman who comes may not be the same one that he has lost.

At all events, Völundr assumes, first that his swan bride will return if he waits in this way (st. 5,7–10), then that she has actually done so (st. 10,5–8). This misplaced confidence puts him off his guard and allows Níðuðr and his men to capture him in his sleep. When Níðuðr accuses him of possessing gold which should belong to the King himself, Völundr reveals that the wealth comes from the swan women and that there was even more of it when all three brothers and their wives were together.

So far, the swan bride appears to have brought nothing but disaster to the hero. Having initiated the relationship and then ended it for reasons which remain inscrutable, she abandons him without his having offended any tabu, denudes him of the brothers who might have defended him, and leaves him with a seemingly reasonable but empty confidence that she will return; this and the wealth abandoned with him make him an easy victim for Níðuðr's greed. One might argue that Völundr breaks a tabu when he names the swan maidens to Níðuðr in explaining his right to the gold, as Lanval does when he mentions his fairy mistress in asserting that even her handmaids are more beautiful than Guinevere.⁷⁹ But nothing in the poem itself implies this, and in any case it cannot explain why the swan woman has already abandoned the hero at an earlier stage. At most, it can only be an indication that their relationship is now irrevocably at an end. There is of course no suggestion that the swan bride was

motivated by a desire to harm the hero, merely that her motivation is inscrutable and takes no account of him; it may also be implied that his reliance on her and on female magic has unfitted him for the real world. At all events, having contributed to his disaster, she is 'out of the story', as the sagas say, being possibly referred to only once more, as the past possessor of rings now worn by Bǫðvildr (*Völundarkviða* 19,1–4); and even that reference is capable of a more ironic sense: 'Now Bǫðvildr wears the red rings which denote my bride.' If that interpretation is correct, it is a recognition by Völundr that his ring magic has brought him a different bride from the one he expected, and even, with a further irony, that in awarding his ring to Bǫðvildr, her parents were unwittingly handing their daughter over to the smith's magic.

The second female figure brought into prominence by the poet of *Völundarkviða* is the queen, Níðuðr's wife. It is hard to be sure to what extent she figured in the received tradition, but she is probably not entirely the poet's own invention. In *Friedrich von Schwaben*, the heroine's enchantress stepmother Queen Flanea is responsible for many of the lovers' problems (although the whole story of the vengeful smith is absent). The Gascon folktale cited by Jón Helgason (Jón Helgason (1962), 47–48) also includes a female villain, the Queen of snakes, though her role in this vengeful smith story is quite different from that of Níðuðr's queen, except for the possible association with wild creatures in both, for the queen in *Völundarkviða* may perhaps be the Queen of bears (see below). It seems possible that the British ballad *Lamkin* is also a descendant of the Weland story, though not solely of *Völundarkviða*, since it includes roles for the villain's wife and the maidservant.⁸⁰ If so, the queen may have had a traditional role as opponent of the hero and participant in the wrongs done to him. Of course wicked stepmothers and the like are stereotyped folktale characters who could easily be invented independently, so the question must remain undecided. But the importance and detail of character attributed to the queen in *Völundarkviða* must be taken as part of this poet's own design.

As soon as she appears, it becomes obvious that Níðuðr is not, like Atli in *Atlakviða*, the sort of tyrant who makes his brutal decisions unaided. The queen is observant, ruthless and vindictive, and it is she who advises that Völundr's sinews be cut in order to render him harmless (stt. 16–17); she points out the resemblance of his teeth to those of a snarling wild animal (however one translates *teygiaz* in 17,1), and of his eyes to those of a snake (17,5–6). It is a curious reversal for Völundr to be described in terms of the animals he used to hunt, and when the queen is later described as *kunnig* (25,3; 30,1; 35,7) the meaning is probably something beyond 'wise' in an ordinary sense, though that sense does underline her role as counsellor.⁸¹ If *kunnig* means 'skilled in foretelling the future', it must be partly ironic, since her perception that Völundr is dangerous is not matched by

foreknowledge of his revenge. But perhaps we should also take it to mean ‘skilled in magic’ (like *ffjolkunnig*); if so, might she be in some sense patroness of the animals Völundr hunts, particularly, perhaps, the curiously specific she-bear that he roasts just before he is captured (*Völundarkviða* 9)? Such a relationship might also be suggested when her sons are repeatedly referred to as *húnar*, ‘cubs’ (*Völundarkviða* 24, 32, 34).⁸² In that case, transforming the hunter into the representative of a captured animal might be an appropriate revenge, though this is only a speculation, and not demonstrable from the text. What is unavoidable, if we take *kunnig* to mean ‘skilled in magic’, is that female magic, in whatever form, is again harmful to the hero.

The next reference is brutally ironic. After Völundr has decapitated the two sons of the queen and Níðuðr, it is to her that he sends jewels made from their eyes (25,1–4). She is, after all, the observant one, so it is appropriate that eyes should be sent to her, and it was she who compared Völundr’s eyes to those of a snake. She must be assumed to be referring to the eyes of an actual snake, but in the hands of the smith it is as if they become the jewel-eyes of a serpent wrought in gold. It is even possible that we should take the gems attached to the rings in *Völundarkviða* 5,3–4 as a foreshadowing of this.

The queen appears again in *Völundarkviða* 30–31. Here, the action of walking along the length of the hall, which preceded her vindictive advice to lame Völundr, is repeated before she asks Níðuðr if he is awake. But this time she is bluntly told that her advice is not wanted (or perhaps she is blamed for her past advice) in the phrase *köld ero mér ráð þín* (31,6). This, echoing the proverb *köld eru kvenna ráð*, ‘women’s advice is cold’,⁸³ is bitterly appropriate, for the vindictive counsellor is punished with the loss of her ability to have her advice listened to; and that, apart from the mocking repetition of Völundr’s macabre gift to her when he tells Níðuðr the details of his revenge (*Völundarkviða* 35), is the last we hear of her.

The poet’s third female character, Bøðvildr, is important in all versions of the story, but it seems to me that her character in *Völundarkviða* is highly individual. Usually, she is regarded with sympathy: this is true in *Piðreks saga* (where she has a different name), by implication in *Deor* (where the grievous situation is seen partly from her point of view), and in the distant reflections of the story in *Friedrich von Schwaben* and the Gascon folktale (see Jón Helgason (1962), 47–48). But in *Völundarkviða* this sympathy is somewhat modified. She is first introduced in two references to her wearing the ring which once belonged to the swan woman: her mother’s casual reference to it as hers (17,3–4) when the queen gloats over Völundr’s recognition of it, and Völundr’s own contrasting reference to it as *brúðar minnar ... bauga rauða*, ‘the red ring(s) of my bride’ (19,2–4). There could be a hint here that Völundr knows already, since she is

wearing the 'insignia' of his wife, that the ring magic which was intended to bring back the swan woman will bring Bǫðvildr to him (see above). The breaking of the ring would then be symbolically appropriate: if it contains sexual magic, any woman who wears it while defying its significance is bound to break it, and it can only be repaired by re-uniting its wearer to its magical meaning.

The poet clearly visualises Bǫðvildr as present when the captured Vǫlundr is condemned to mutilation, and as seeing his reaction on recognising the ring. In view of this, her next action, in coming to him with the broken ring and asking him to mend it, shows an astonishing blend of arrogance and insensitivity. She is the sort of woman who seeks to get her own way by a mixture of what she regards as feminine charm with flattering the servant by making him her partner in a little conspiracy. There is also a touch of duplicity about her intention to conceal the breaking of the ring from her parents; looked at in this way, she deserves the insincere reassurances Vǫlundr offers her in return (*Vǫlundarkviða* 27), and perhaps even the drink-supported seduction which follows. Indeed, if the breaking of the ring symbolised a divorce between its magical significance and the actual situation, she is unwittingly asking to be seduced when she demands its repair. That, however, does nothing to reconcile me to Vǫlundr's coldly single-minded attitude to her, or his heartless laughter as he rises into the air and abandons her (29,5–6). Bǫðvildr is not only deceived and made pregnant, but also morally humiliated, since her grief is caused by Vǫlundr's departure as well as fear of her father's anger (29,9–10). It would seem that she has become sexually and emotionally dependent on her seducer.

At the end of the poem, Bǫðvildr is left to face her father's blunt question about whether she slept with Vǫlundr (*Vǫlundarkviða* 40). Obviously, she is pregnant and cannot deny it; but there is a contrast between her splendid clothing (39,5) and the uneasy excuses with which the poem ends. It may be true that she lacked the cunning and strength to resist Vǫlundr, but her grief at his departure hardly suggests that she would have resisted him if she had been able to. Once again, she looks insincere, morally as well as physically compromised.

The poet apparently stresses the role of women in the story largely because his attitude to them is consistently suspicious; he portrays them as selfish, insincere and, in the queen's case, vindictive. There also seem to be traces of a fear of the magical powers of women, which are portrayed as consistently harmful in their effects; this is hardly surprising in a culture which regarded *seiðr* as a characteristically female art, treated it with consistent fear and loathing, and made it subject to severe legal penalties.⁸⁴ There was an artistic problem here, because Vǫlundr himself, as a flying smith of elvish origins, is unavoidably a practitioner of magic, so it was not possible to adopt a single dismissive attitude to all magic without alienating sympathy from the poem's

central figure. It therefore has to be suggested that Völundr's elvish magic is in some sense natural and just, while the magic of the female characters is morally repulsive and harmful in its effects. We in our turn may find this distinction morally unattractive, but that must not blind us to its presence, or to the possibility that the poet's first audience may have sympathised with it.

But if the hostile portrayal of women in the poem springs from an attempt to portray Völundr's revenge as a kind of justice, we may reasonably ask how far that attempt is successful. Some aspects of it are clear enough: Níðuðr is finally left 'deprived of his will' (*vilia lauss* 31,2), just as Völundr was after his capture (st. 11,4); Níðuðr is deprived of sleep in brooding over the loss of his sons (st. 31,1–4), just as Völundr was kept awake, plotting revenge, after his maiming (st. 20,1–4); and it is grimly appropriate that the tyrant whose motivation was greed for precious objects should receive the payment he deserves in such objects, made from the skulls of his sons.

Völundr's dynastic revenge on Níðuðr may also be connected with the other object of which he has been deprived, his sword (*Völundarkviða* 18, 20). Just as the ring seems connected with female sexuality, the sword may be a virility symbol, as in *Laxdæla saga* ch. 46, where Kjartan's loss of his sword and later recovery of it without its sheath seems to symbolise his loss of sexual self-esteem after he is deprived of Guðrún;⁸⁵ a similar symbolism can be seen in the British ballad *Sheath and Knife*,⁸⁶ and seems to have been inherent in the Old English language itself, where the male sex was called *wæpnedcynn*. If the theft of the sword and the physical mutilation are seen by Völundr as a symbolic castration of him by his captor,⁸⁷ it may seem just for him to repay this with a negation of Níðuðr's virility and a corresponding assertion of his own.

The queen, too, is appropriately punished, with ironic gifts made from eyes for the observant woman; with loss of the influence over her husband which she has misused; and with loss of her sons because of her part in the symbolic castration of Völundr, in suggesting his mutilation.

Some recent criticism has regarded Bǫðvildr with more sympathy (e.g. Motz [1986], 63), but she does much to place herself in the position of substitute 'wife', and can hardly complain about Völundr's seduction of her. His desertion of her, however, is another matter. This gives the impression that he is punishing Bǫðvildr for the desertion that he himself suffered from the swan woman, for which neither Bǫðvildr herself nor anyone in her family is responsible. And the idea of justice also looks shabby when applied to the murder of the two boys. Perhaps they are attracted to the smithy for the second time by the same greed for precious objects which motivates their father, but that seems an unduly harsh view, especially as Völundr deliberately stirs up this desire

in them. Of course, their deaths are required for the completion of Völundr's revenge, but it is a dubious justice which demands casual sacrifice of the innocent or insists on the corporate responsibility of a whole family. Nor is it supported by codes of law: *Grágás* I, chs. 86, 90 permit vengeance for a number of offences, including killing, serious wounding and rape, but only against the offender himself;⁸⁸ the only instance of corporate responsibility arises when killing or wounding is done by a child (*Gragas* I, ch. 91), and even then the family is only liable financially.⁸⁹ Similarly, codes that were current in Anglo-Norse areas, such as the secular laws of Cnut (ca. 1027–34), imply the right of vengeance, but only against the offender in person.⁹⁰ And even if insistence on joint family responsibility is common in ON literature, and may often have seemed acceptable to contemporary audiences, it must surely have strained their sympathy when the poet insists that the victims are mere children (*húnar*, 24,2; 32,4; 34,6), just as it would when Guðrún grimly jokes to the children she is about to murder that she has long wanted to cure them of old age (*Atlamál* 78,3–4). As *húnar* can also mean 'bear-cubs', this is also a return to the imagery of Völundr as a hunter in the first part of the poem (see e.g. *Völundarkviða* 4); but now that imagery is suffused with a coldness and cruelty which it did not have when he merely hunted for food. This is also partial and self-interested 'justice' in another way, for part of Völundr's motivation for the boys' murder seems to be to replace Níðuðr's dynasty with his own, and it is not Níðuðr who has deprived him dynastically (unless symbolically), but, if anyone, the swan woman. Behaving as if Níðuðr were responsible for this looks like a kind of self-deception.

If Völundr had been the divine figure he probably once was, the extreme nature of his 'justice' might have seemed acceptable in an ancient, primitive way, and as Kaaren Grimstad has pointed out, there remains about him something of the vengeful god confronting a human being who has injured him.⁹¹ The implied argument is like that between Cadmus and Dionysus at the end of Euripides' *The Bacchae*:

CADMUS: ... but your vengeance is too heavy.

DIONYSUS: I am a god; and you insulted me.

Gods, as Dionysus explains, must take vengeance, 'that mortal men may know that the gods are greater than they'.⁹² But Völundr is no longer a wholly divine figure, and apart from taking over the probably traditional phrases which call him an elf, the poet seems to regard him as a man. When gods come to be judged by the standards normally applied to human beings, eddic poets often find them wanting (as in *Völuspá* and *Lokasenna*); to explain Völundr's behaviour as due to his elvish origins does not, therefore, amount to a defence of him.

In any case, elves were regarded with much suspicion in Christian Anglo-Saxon England (they are among the kindred of Cain killed in the Flood in *Beowulf* 112),⁹³ and most of the vocabulary associated with them concentrates on their malicious aspect (see BT under the headings *ilfig*, ‘mad’; *ælfadl*, *ælf-sogoða*, ‘diseases caused by elves’; *ælsiden*, ‘nightmare’; *ælfpone*, ‘enchanter’s nightshade’). The only word with a contrary implication is *ælfsciene*, ‘of elfin beauty’, applied to women; but even this may have included an element of mistrust, if the attitudes evident in *Völundarkviða* were at all common.

Anglo-Saxons also seem to have had doubts about the justice of Weland’s revenge. *Deor* and Alfred’s *Boethius*, *Metrum* 10 both avoid discussing it, and the Franks Casket carver is by implication hostile to him in juxtaposing the bringing of Þóðvildr’s ring with the gifts of the Magi to Christ – the vengeful old order set against the merciful new one. The poet of *Völundarkviða* is enough of an artist to be more even-handed, and allows us our own view, but the tide of opinion was perhaps already running against such primitive ‘justice’, and Völundr’s days as a hero were numbered.

NOTES

- 1 Bugge (1909–10); Jón Helgason (1962).
- 2 de Vries (1952); Schröder (1977).
- 3 In stt. 1 and 3, the plural *ungar* is required by the sense, but the scribe mechanically uses the singular form of the phrase which is correct in st. 10; this may suggest that he did not understand it.
- 4 *Klaeber’s Beowulf* (2008), 51; the word also appears in Yorkshire Middle English, in the plural form *all-wyghtys*, in the early fifteenth-century *Secunda Pastorum* in the Towneley mystery cycle (ed. Stevens and Cawley (1994), I, 132 and note on II, 498–99), where the third shepherd pretends to think that the other two are alien spirits.
- 5 See *The Exeter Book*, ed. Krapp and Dobbie (1936): *ASPR* 3, 212. For the suggestion of the sense ‘experiences battle’ in *Völundarkviða*, see Jón Helgason (1962), 55–56, but further see Crozier (1987), 6–10.
- 6 *Heliand und Genesis*, ed. Behaghel (1984), 133, 122.
- 7 For the literal sense, see *Pula IV pp* 1,1 (*Skj.* I B, 674) and Óláfr Þórðarson hvítaskáld 1,3 (*Skj.* II B, 104); for *gim* in gold-kennings (all in the context of jewellery worn by women), see Kormákr, *lausavísa* 31,5 (*Skj.* I B, 77), Gunnlaugr, *lausavísa* 7,7 (*Skj.* I B, 186–87) and Tindr Hallkelsson, *drápa* for Hákon jarl 1,1–2 (*Skj.* I B, 136); for *gim* in sword-kennings, see *Grettis saga*, *lausavísa* 47,5–6 (*Skj.* II B, 474), Eiríkr víðsjá, *lausavísa* 5,6 (*Skj.* I B, 200) and Anon. (XIII), B 17,7 (*Skj.* II B, 151).

- 8 Von See et al. (2000), 150–53 take *gim* to mean ‘fire’ and translate ‘am feuer-festen [Amboss]’ ‘to the (thing) fastened to the fire (i.e. the anvil)’, drawing a parallel with the compound *vinfastr* ‘loyal to a friend’ in Ormr Steinþórsson, *poem about a woman* 5,4 (*Skj.* I B, 385). This is ingenious, although the anvil is not really ‘fixed’ to the fire and they do not address the metrical problem.
- 9 *The Anglo-Saxon Minor Poems*, ed. Dobbie (1942): *ASPR* 6, 56.
- 10 Ed. Kuhn (1965), 123; ed. Sweet (1885), 368.
- 11 Ed. Crawford (1922), 411
- 12 Pfeifer (1974), 53; Sweet (1885), 102.
- 13 See e.g. *Laws of Ine* 11: *Gyfhwa his agene leodan bebigce* ‘if anyone buys (or sells) his own fellow-citizen’, ed. Liebermann (1898–1916), I, 94–95 (MS B; other MSS have the strong form (*ge*)*leod*), and cf. the Latin version in the *Quadripartitus*: *Si quis compatriotam suum emat*; trans. Whitelock (1955), 365. For the plural meaning ‘people’, see e.g. *ASC* I, 136, 194–95, under the years 1006, 1065.
- 14 See e.g. *Heliand* 101, 187, ed. Behaghel (1984), 10, 13.
- 15 Ed. Krapp (1932b), 166.
- 16 Ed. Brook and Leslie (1963–78), II 550–51.
- 17 Ed. Hill (2009), 40, 130.
- 18 See ed. Hill (2009), 47; Stephens (1969), 371–74. OE *nyd* / ON *naud* is also the name of the rune meaning N, and appears as a curse-element in at least two magical charms (see McKinnell, Simek and Düwel [2004], 140–44); this raises the possibility that the binding of *Völundr* may also have had a magical element (for which the queen would perhaps have been responsible).
- 19 ed. Behaghel (1984), 13.
- 20 Ed. Krapp (1932a), 94.
- 21 Ed. Wildhagen (1910), 316.
- 22 See Kuhn (1939), 232–34; Bliss (1962), 30.
- 23 See *Klaeber’s Beowulf*, ed. Fulk, Bjork and Niles (2008), 89; *The Dream of the Rood*, ed. Swanton (1970), 95; *Elene*, ed. Krapp (1932a): *ASPR* 2, 81.
- 24 Ed. Krapp and Dobbie (1936): *ASPR* 3, 4.
- 25 Ed. Behaghel (1984), 13.
- 26 For an example of this word with the vowel *i*, see Whitelock (1930), 90, no. 34, 1. 29.
- 27 Ed. Dobbie (1942): *ASPR* 6, 18, 11; on the latter see also Robinson (1976), 25–40.
- 28 Ed. Behaghel (1984), 240–43.
- 29 See Jón Helgason (1962), 27–29. The surviving forms of the smith’s name suggest at least two different derivations: OE *Weland* and MHG *Wielant* may be derived from the same root as ON *vél* ‘trick’, ‘device’, ‘machine’ (so ‘the inventor’?), but this is hard to connect with ON *Völundr*, OF *Galans*, which could be connected either with *val-* ‘exotic’, ‘southern’, ‘Roman’, or with *vǫlr* ‘a (magic) staff’. An association between craftsmanship and magic may have led to confusion of two

- or more possible origins of the name, and hence to varying forms of it, but the problem remains unsolved. Further see Bammesberger (1998), 122–23.
- 30 Used to describe Judas in *Heliand* 4628, ed. Behaghel (1984), 165.
- 31 See respectively Behaghel, ed. (1984), 174, 122, 68, 188.
- 32 *The Junius Manuscript*, ed. Krapp (1931): *ASPR* 1, 40, describing the wickedness of human beings just before the Flood.
- 33 Typical is *Heliand* 4432: *uuola uualdand god*, ed. Behaghel (1984), 158; nearest to *wola du* is *Heliand* 3024: *uuela that thu uuif habes*, ed. Behaghel (1984), 111.
- 34 Eg. *wel me, wel me hlaford*, used as an exclamation in the *Life of St Giles* in Cambridge, Corpus Christi College MS 303, p. 123, l. 2; and *wel þe* in Assmann, ed. (1889), 167 (*Homily 14*, on the Last Judgement, ll. 94, 97).
- 35 E.g. *Heliand* 3114, ed. Behaghel (1984), 114.
- 36 See e.g. *Order of the World* 53 (in *The Exeter Book*, ed. Krapp and Dobbie (1936): *ASPR* 3, 165), and *ASC* I, 134–35, under the year 1003.
- 37 See e.g. eight instances in *Leechdoms*, ed. Cockayne (1864–66), e.g. I, 20, twice on 136.
- 38 Ed. Guðni Jónsson (1951), I, 112–13; ed. Bertelsen (1905–11), I, 125–28; trans. Haymes (1988), 53–54.
- 39 ed. Krapp (1932b): *ASPR* 5, 22.
- 40 ed. Faulkes (1991), 20; trans. Faulkes (1987), 192.
- 41 Looijenga (2003), 308; Bammesberger (1998), 124. Bammesberger also cites *Velandu* and *Wilandus* as names of historical people, the first in an inscription from Ebersheim, near Mainz, the second (presumably an Ostrogoth) in a letter from Pope Gregory to the Bishop of Ravenna.
- 42 The runes bracketed here are sloped and more crudely engraved than the rest; they may not be intended as runes, but only as decoration to fill the space at the end of the first line.
- 43 See McKinnell, Simek and Düwel (2004), 57–59; one possible interpretation not included there is ‘Egill and Qlrun blamed the (alien) tugging’ (i.e. the mysterious force that pulled them apart – cf. *Völundarkviða* 3,3–6).
- 44 Further see Marold (1996).
- 45 Sigvatr, *Erfridrápa Olafs helga* 16 (shortly after 1030); *Skj.* I B, 243; Kock I, 125.
- 46 Anon. 10th century III C 3,1–2; *Skj.* I B, 174; Kock I, 93.
- 47 Þjóðólfr Arnórsson, *Sexsteffa* 14 (ca. 1065); *Skj.* I B, 342; Kock I, 172.
- 48 See *The Old English Orosius*, ed. Bately (1980), 14–15.
- 49 *Widsið* 20, 76, ed. in Hill (2009), 31, 34 and note on 98–99.
- 50 Heinzl, Fitter and Parslow (1974), 44.
- 51 see e.g. Napier (1900), 159, 180; Oliphant (1966), 145, where it glosses Latin *dodrans*, ‘tidal wave’, or *malina*, ‘high tide’; for the senses of these Latin words see Latham (1965), 154, 287.

- 52 On the Crowle Stone (South Humberside), see Page (1999), 29, 142; on the Lincoln Stone, Okasha (1971), 92–93; on the Sutton brooch (Cambridgeshire), Okasha (1971), 116–17. On the Lincoln inscriptions, see Holman (1996), 46–55; Barnes and Page (2006), 292–95, 334–37.
- 53 The Skelton sundial bears an inscription in Roman capitals and a smaller runic fragment, both unintelligible but possibly in an anglicised form of Old Norse; it has usually been dated to the eleventh century, and may be the latest evidence for the Norse language in Yorkshire – see Barnes and Page (2006), 301–07; Okasha (1971), 109–10. The Settle fragment may be a nineteenth-century imitation of an inscription from Maeshowe, Orkney (see Barnes and Page (2006), 340–41).
- 54 For detailed descriptions of individual Yorkshire stones, see the following: Great Edstone: Okasha (1971), 73; Castlegate, York: Okasha (1971), 131; Collingham: Page (1999), 131–36; Aldbrough: Okasha (1971), 47; Kirkdale: Okasha (1971), 87–88.
- 55 For a general discussion of Norse inscriptions in Cumbria, see Holman (1996), 56–85; for individual stones see the following: Carlisle Cathedral: Holman (1996), 69–71, Barnes and Page (2006), 289–92; Pennington: Holman (1996), 73–77, Barnes and Page (2006), 307–12; Bridekirk: Holman (1996), 66–69, Barnes and Page (2006), 278–85. The inscription on an altar stone from Conishead Priory, now lost, seems to have dated from the thirteenth century (see Holman [1996], 77–78, Barnes and Page [2006], 316–20), but was probably carved by a visiting Scandinavian craftsman and provides no evidence for Norse speech among the population of Cumbria at such a late date.
- 56 Bailey (1980), 105; McGuire and Clark (1987), 11, 25, 36–37.
- 57 See York Minster 9A in Lang (1991), 58–59 and illustration 35.
- 58 For Kirby Stephen 1A see Bailey (1980): plate 40; Bailey and Cramp (1988), 120–21 and illustration 390.
- 59 The Leeds Museum fragment also comes from Leeds parish church, where it was discovered during renovation of the tower. Further on both Leeds sculptures, see Coatsworth (2008), 198–203, fig. 16 and illustrations 480, 485, 487. For Sherburn, where 2A and 3A are probably fragments of the same cross panel, see Lang (1991), 202–03 and illustrations 764, 768. For the fragmentary hogback from Bedale, see Lang (2001), 61–62, fig. 13 and illustration 23.
- 60 Lindqvist (1941–42), I, taf. 139, 140, II 22–24 and fig. 311.
- 61 It is possible that the gilt-bronze figure of a man with tied-on wings and tail discovered at Uppåkra, Skåne, Sweden in 2011 may also represent Völundr, though it does not include either the headless bodies of the Ardre depiction or the smith's tools and the female figure that are found both at Ardre and on the Yorkshire stones. For an illustration of the Uppåkra figure, see www.lunduniversity.lu.se/o.o.i.s?id=24890&news_item=5895/. For a drawing of it, see the cover of this book.

- 62 Eyvindr skáldaspillir, *lausavísa* 14,8 (ca. 970); *Skj.*I B, 65; Kock I, 40.
- 63 Hallfreðr vandræðaskáld, *Hákonardrápa* 8,4 (ca. 990); *Skj.*I B, 148; Kock I, 81.
- 64 Þjóðólfr of Hvin, *Haustlǫng* 9,8 (ca. 925); *Skj.*I B, 16; Kock I, 10.
- 65 Ed. Guðni Jónsson (1951), I, 115; ed. Bertelsen (1905–11), I, 132–33; trans. Haymes (1988), 54–55.
- 66 Ed. Mommsen (1882), 65, 104; trans. Mierow (1915), 62, 101; and see Hill, ed. (2009), 130.
- 67 ed. Jellinek (1904), xviii–xix; cf. Jón Helgason, ed. (1962), 42.
- 68 For illustrations of the relevant panels on the Franks Casket, see Jón Helgason, ed. (1962), 32–33.
- 69 Ed. Guðni Jónsson (1951), I, 112–15; ed. Bertelsen (1905–11), I, 125–31.
- 70 Further on Egill's fame as an archer, see *Þiðreks saga*, ed. Guðni Jónsson (1951), I, 110–11; ed. Bertelsen (1905–11), I, 123–24; trans. Haymes (1988), 52–53; and *Hemings þáttir*, ed. Fellows Jensen (1962), cxix–cxxi.
- 71 *Þiðreks saga*, ed. Guðni Jónsson (1951), I, 109–10; ed. Bertelsen (1905–11), I, 120–21; trans. Haymes (1988), 51–52.
- 72 *Waldere* II, 8–9; ed. Hill (2009), 40 and note on 130.
- 73 See Fell (1984), 58; Wikman (1959).
- 74 ed. Ewart (1944), 58–74, and for its Norse form, see *Strengleikar*, ed. Cook and Tveitane (1979), 212–27.
- 75 See Schofield (1900), 133–46; Cross (1914–15), 621–22; ed. Grimes (1928). A damaged ON text of *Grae lent* appears in *Strengleikar*, ed. Cook and Tveitane (1979), 278–90.
- 76 See *Hrólfs saga kraka*, ed. Slay (1960), 31–33; *FSN* II, 25–27; *Gibbons saga*, ed. Page (1960), 4–8; for other ON parallels, see Boberg (1966): F300 (pp. 105–06); further Irish parallels are given by Cross.
- 77 Hatto (1961), 334, 351; Motz (1986), 53.
- 78 Child (1882–98), II 238–39, no. 79.
- 79 *Lanval* 293–302, ed. Ewart (1963), 65.
- 80 See Child (1882–98), II 320–42, no. 93. The swan-maidens story is absent from *Lamkin*, but it includes most features of the vengeful smith story: a lord with a sinister name (Lord Wearie) who refuses to reward the craftsman for his work (as in *Þiðreks saga*); the craftsman's murder of the lord's child (who has here become an infant); a daughter who is sexually offered to the craftsman if he will spare the mother's life; and a nurse (equivalent to the maidservant in *Þiðreks saga* and on the Franks casket) who colludes with the craftsman. However, it also includes the murder of the lady (equivalent to the Queen) by the craftsman, and the final execution of both craftsman and nurse by the returning lord. One reason for doubting a link between *Völundarkviða* and *Lamkin*, however, is the apparent absence of any comparable Scandinavian ballads.
- 81 On the prevalence of the sense 'skilled in magic', see CV 359.

- 82 For *húnn* with the sense ‘bear’, see Hallar-Steinn, *Reksteffa* 13,1 (*Skj.* I B, 528; Kock I, 257), and probably Víga-Glúmr, *lausavísa* 5,1 (*Skj.* I B, 113; Kock I, 64).
- 83 See Jón Helgason, ed. (1962), 75.
- 84 See Strömbäck (1970), 79; Halvorsen (1960).
- 85 Ed. Einar Ólafur Sveinsson (1934): ÍF 5, 140–42.
- 86 Ed. Child (1882–98), I, 185–87, no. 16.
- 87 For this interpretation of physical mutilation, see Meulengracht Sørensen (1980), 101–06; (1983), 81–85.
- 88 Ed. Finsen (1852), 147, 164–65; trans. Dennis, Foote and Perkins (1980), 141, 154.
- 89 Ed. Finsen (1852), 166; trans. Dennis, Foote and Perkins (1980), 155.
- 90 E.g. in 56, where a murderer is to be handed over to his victim’s relatives, ed. Liebermann (1898–1916), I, 348–49; trans. Whitelock (1955), 427.
- 91 See Grimstad (1983), 198–201.
- 92 *The Bacchae*, trans. Vellacott (1954), 226, 225.
- 93 *Klaeber’s Beowulf*, ed. Fulk, Bjork and Niles (2008), 6; trans. Heaney (1999), 6. Further on Anglo-Saxon and Old Norse elves, see Hall (2007); for a brief survey of elves elsewhere in ON literary sources, see Ármann Jakobsson (2006), who suggests that they are symbolically equivalent to the tendency of gentle and patient people to react to intolerable injustice with disproportionate violence.

10 Female Reactions to the Death of Sigurðr

I want in this paper to look at a single moment in the legend of the Nibelungen – the situation immediately after the death of Sîfrit. To someone who, like me, comes to the German epic as an outsider from the North, there are three strange features about this section of the *Nibelungenlied* (roughly Âv. 17):

1. The discovery of Sîfrit's body by a servant outside Kriemhilt's room (stt. 1005–06)¹ is a strange and rather unsatisfactory compromise. It seems likely that the poem's source had the corpse thrown into her bed, as happens in *Piðreks saga* ch. 391;² the softening of this motif can be explained in terms of a courtly taste that found the ostentatious display of bloody deeds distasteful, especially when it was directed against ladies, but the result seems oddly half-hearted and no less cruel.
2. Prûnhilt, whose psychology has been central to the story up to this point, is scarcely mentioned from now on, except for a reference to her pride at the end of Âv. 18 (st. 1100,1). This may again be due to the poet's sources, but it suggests that he was only interested in Prûnhilt so long as she remained necessary to the development of the story as it affects the main male characters, and the modern reader may feel cheated at not being told more about her reaction to the murder of which she was the main instigator.
3. The portrayal of Kriemhilt in this section rather implausibly juxtaposes an extreme and disabling grief with remarkable political cunning. On the one hand, she instinctively knows that the dead knight is Sîfrit before seeing the body (stt. 1008–10), has an elaborate scene of grief and tribute in church (stt. 1055–56), and faints and weeps blood at the grave-side (stt. 1066–70). On the other, she is instantly resourceful on behalf of her dead husband's family, warning Sigemunt (st. 1017), making sure that the Netherlanders give Gunther's men no excuse for attacking them

(stt. 1029–35) and skilfully setting up the public demonstration of Hagen's guilt when Sifrit's wounds bleed afresh as Hagen approaches the bier (stt. 1043–44). Both aspects of her behaviour were probably forced on the poet: the first by audience expectations of the sorrow proper to a widowed courtly lady (which is shared by Uote, by the other courtly ladies, and even by the wives of merchants, stt. 1051, 1037), and the second by her determination to take future revenge for her husband's death (which is itself the result of the romance assumption that she will place the emotional demands of sexual love before those of her blood kin). Again, the concerns with the character's plot function and with her behaviour in public seem to be placed before the presentation of a believable personal reaction.

Some might argue that this is an inevitable result of a general medieval lack of interest in the individual psyche.³ To test this view, I shall look at the variety of ways in which this part of the story is handled in the legendary poems of the Codex Regius of the *Poetic Edda*, an anthology compiled in Iceland in the later thirteenth century. Its individual poems vary in date, one or two being probably as old as the late ninth century, but those concerned with the death of Sigurðr are generally thought to be mostly of twelfth- or early thirteenth-century origin.⁴ The later poems were clearly composed with knowledge of the earlier ones, and this enables us to work out a sequence for their composition:

1. *Brot af Sigurðarkviðu*, 'Fragment of a Lay of Sigurðr', also called *Sigurðarkviða in forna* 'The Ancient Lay of Sigurðr' (*Brot*). This consists of the last 19 stanzas of a poem of which the earlier part is lost due to a quire having fallen out of the manuscript. Its surviving text begins during Gunnarr's incitement of Högni to kill Sigurðr and it ends with Brynhildr's revelation that, contrary to the impression she had previously given, Sigurðr had behaved honourably towards her when he came to woo her on Gunnarr's behalf.⁵
2. *Sigurðarkviða in skamma*, 'The Short Lay of Sigurðr' (*Sgsk.*), a complete poem of 71 stanzas which is dominated by the character of Brynhildr. It begins with Sigurðr's visit to Gjúki's court and ends with Brynhildr's suicide.⁶
3. A lost *Sigurðarkviða in meira*, 'The Longer Lay of Sigurðr' (*meira*), whose substance can be reconstructed from the use of it as the source of *Völsunga saga* chs. 25–31,⁷ but which I shall not discuss in this paper because its poetic text does not survive.
4. *Guðrúnarkviða II*, 'The Second Lay of Guðrún' (*Gðr.II*), a possibly incomplete poem of 44 stanzas, so called because it is the second lay

about Guðrún in the sequence of the Codex Regius. In a prose passage at the end of *Brot*, the editor of the Codex Regius refers to this poem as *Guðrúnarkviða in forna* ‘The Old Lay of Guðrún’, but in fact it is probably not particularly early in date.⁸ It is placed entirely in Guðrún’s mouth, and begins with her marriage to Sigurðr and ends with her deceitful interpretation of Atli’s dreams before she murders him.

5. *Guðrúnarkviða I*, ‘The First Lay of Guðrún’ (*Gðr.I*), a complete poem of 27 stanzas, so called from its position in the manuscript; this poem is dominated by the emotional reactions of Guðrún to the death of Sigurðr.⁹

A final poem cannot be placed in the sequence of borrowings that can be established for the others, but is certainly late and perhaps the latest of all of them:

6. *Helreið Brynhildar*, ‘Brynhildr’s Ride to Hel’ (*Hlr.*), a poem of 14 stanzas, possibly incomplete, in which the dead Brynhildr, after her suicide following the killing of Sigurðr, defends her behaviour against the accusations of a hag who accosts her during her ride to the realm of the dead to be reunited with him.¹⁰

All these poems are short and ballad-like (those that survive in full vary between 108 and 566 short lines),¹¹ and the poets therefore select only the speeches and narrative details that they think important; every line must be assumed to be significant to the poet’s overall design. They are a good example of a mode of composition that is clearly designed for performance aloud, but that does not prevent them from having more or less fixed texts which often quote each other, or carefully chosen dramatic and symbolic detail.

In one important respect, the differences between the Norse poems are due to their differing source materials. What is probably the earliest Old Norse allusion to the murder of Sigurðr, in *Hamðismál* 6–7,¹² reveals a Scandinavian tradition in which he was murdered in bed by Guðrún’s brothers Gunnarr and Högni; later Norse sources change the identity of the actual killer to their brother Guttormr, who has not sworn an oath of loyalty to Sigurðr as his brothers have, but Gunnarr and Högni remain the instigators of the crime and morally culpable for it. This ‘murder in bed’ tradition is followed in *Sgsk.* 24, which also makes Guðrún cry out with grief as Sigurðr dies (*Sgsk.* 29) and Brynhildr give an answering laugh of triumph (*Sgsk.* 30). But other Norse poems are influenced by the German tradition that Sigurðr’s murder took place in the woods (so in *Brot* and *Gðr.II*). These poems also include the details of Sigurðr’s horse Grani lamenting over his dead master and Högni giving the news of the murder to Guðrún (without the attempt at deception found in

the *Nibelungenlied*). But we should beware of regarding these so-called ‘Scandinavian’ and ‘German’ traditions as wholly distinct from each other, for although Guðrún’s cry of grief, which belongs to the murder-in-bed tradition, is not found in the German-influenced poems, Brynhildr’s answering laugh of triumph survives in *Brot* 10. It would seem that the Norse poets were capable of adopting details from different source traditions at will, so long as they did not actually contradict one another.

One notable feature of these Norse poems is the large amount of direct speech by women that is to be found in them. Because most of the lays in the Poetic Edda are brief and dialogue can be an effective way of highlighting what is important in a story, many of them contain high proportions of direct speech, but except where the subject-matter is prophecy by a non-human female, it is rare for female characters to have as much to say as their male counterparts.¹³ But the poems concerned with the death of Sigurðr are an exception; the figures are:

Figure 10.1

Lay	Lines	Male direct speech	Female direct speech
<i>Brot</i>	150 surviving	24 (and 4 by a raven)	68
<i>Sgsk.</i>	566	110	282
<i>Gðr.II</i>	350	0	(entire poem is a speech by Guðrún)
<i>Gðr.I</i>	212	0	132
<i>Hlr.</i>	108	0	108

It is also clear from these figures that the predominance of female speech tends to become greater in the later poems. It is of course understandable that women’s voices should be prominent after the death of a hero, because men were inhibited by the expectations of the heroic code from showing excessive grief,¹⁴ and so it was easier to put laments into the mouths of women without losing the sympathy of the audience for the speaker. But that does not explain the situation here. Firstly, much of what the women say in these poems is not in any sense lament for the hero; this applies particularly to the character of Brynhildr, especially in *Sgsk.* Secondly, male voices are entirely absent from the latest poems, and the concentration on emotional statement by women becomes so great that there is a tendency, especially in *Gðr.I*, even to suppress details of the plot in order to make room for it.

In the two oldest poems of the group, *Brot* and *Sgsk.*, the character of Brynhildr is more important than that of Guðrún. In *Brot* she is seen, as is usual

in the earlier eddic poems, more through her actions than her thoughts. There is only one point at which a motivation is attributed to her, where Högni, in the course of trying to dissuade Gunnarr from the murder, says that Brynhildr has egged her husband on because she is inspired by sexual envy towards Guðrún and resentment at having Gunnarr as her own husband (*Brot* 3). But this hostile view need not be taken as authoritative: it comes from a character, not from the narrator, and on the surface there is little else to support it in what survives of the poem. When Högni reveals the murder, Brynhildr forestalls Guðrún's reaction by giving her approval, saying that Sigurðr would improperly have become sole ruler of the Burgundians if he had lived a little longer; this apparent expression of confidence that her husband has consolidated his power becomes the context for her notorious laugh (*Brot* 8–10). But the next morning she wakes a little before day and expresses her grief, causing general bewilderment by her apparent change of mind (*Brot* 15):

Þogðu allir við því orði,
fár kunni þeim flióða látom,
er hon grátandi gorðiz at segia
þat er hlæiandi hōlða beiddi.

All were silent at those words;
few understood that behaviour of
the lady,
when weeping she began to speak
of what
she had urged on the warriors
laughing.

She now tells of her evil dreams, prophesying captivity and disaster for Gunnarr (*Brot* 16,1–8), reminding him that he has broken an oath of foster-brotherhood in plotting to kill Sigurðr (*Brot* 16,9–12), and as a dreadful parting shot revealing that when Sigurðr had been sent to woo her in Gunnarr's behalf, he had not had sex with her, but had placed a naked sword between them in the bed (*Brot* 18–19). This last point shows that she had earlier deliberately misled Gunnarr into believing that Sigurðr had sworn oaths to him and betrayed them all (*Brot* 2). The part of the text in which she deceived him does not survive, but she may have told him that Sigurðr had betrayed them both when he went to woo her. Naturally enough, Gunnarr thinks (as Brynhildr intended him to) that this means that Sigurðr had slept with her during the wooing expedition. But her actual meaning probably referred to the earlier betrothal between Brynhildr and Sigurðr himself, which he had been caused to forget by a magic potion given to him by Guðrún's mother Grímhildr:¹⁵ she may have meant that Sigurðr had betrayed Brynhildr herself by ignoring the earlier betrothal and Gunnarr by not telling him about it, or that he had betrayed her and himself in disregarding their betrothal, or that he had betrayed her and Gunnarr's trust by revealing the details of the wooing trick to Guðrún. In the absence of the first part of the

poem, it is not possible to decide between these possibilities, but the usual conventions of Old Norse story-telling make it seem probable that she deceived Gunnarr with ambiguous words rather than by telling an outright lie.

Some critics have taken Brynhildr's switch from rejoicing to grief in *Brot* as a statement about romantic passion: Andersson's verdict is that 'it all looks suspiciously like jealousy'.¹⁶ This may be correct, but the poem never says so. Her grief might be caused by the realisation, too late, that in causing the death of the Hunnish Sigurðr she has stirred the anger of her brother Atli and provoked the downfall of the Burgundians. Perhaps, after all, it is more likely that her grief is for Sigurðr, but even so, there is no suggestion that she regrets what she has done, or that she would not have been prepared to do the same thing again in the service of a compulsion greater than love. Nor are we told whether that compulsion was to deprive Guðrún of the most distinguished husband (the motivation implied by Hǫgni in *Brot* 3, and the probable motivation in *mei-ra*);¹⁷ to clear her own sexual honour by making sure that she has one 'husband' rather than two;¹⁸ or to reassert her honour by taking vengeance on Sigurðr for his infidelity to her. Nor are we told what she will do next – the poem simply ends at this point. In the earlier eddic poems we are often deliberately not told such things; as in the family sagas, it is left to each listener to form his or her own conclusions.

The Brynhildr we encounter in *Sgsk.* has become the dominant character in the poem. She emphatically states her desire to possess Sigurðr herself (*Sgsk.* 6), immediately after we have been shown the episode of the sword in the bed and her marriage to Gunnarr under the mistaken impression that it was he who had wooed her (*Sgsk.* 4–5). But Brynhildr's dominant mood in this poem does not look like love so much as an unbridled desire to own Sigurðr combined with a sense of contempt for everyone else.¹⁹ She does not try to deceive Gunnarr into committing the murder, but rather bullies him, threatening to leave him, taking control over her lands with her, unless he has Sigurðr and his young son killed (*Sgsk.* 11–12). Gunnarr's character is correspondingly more despicable in this poem: he cannot bear to lose Brynhildr and her treasures (*Sgsk.* 15), he tries to bribe Hǫgni into helping him with the lure of Sigurðr's gold (*Sgsk.* 16), and it is his idea to involve Guttormr as the actual assassin, adding that he is *yngra bróður ófróðari* 'a more naïve younger brother' (*Sgsk.* 20,3–4). Brynhildr's laugh of triumph on hearing Guðrún's cry of grief after the murder (*Sgsk.* 30) leads, not to a change of emotion in her, as in *Brot*, but to a quarrel with Gunnarr, in which she once again gets the better of him: in what looks like an attempt to shift the blame for Sigurðr's death onto her, Gunnarr accuses her of malice and says she would deserve to see her brother Atli cut down in front of her face

(*Sgsk.* 31–32), but she retorts that he has done enough killing already, that Atli is not afraid of his threats, and that he will live longer and continue to be mightier than Gunnarr himself (*Sgsk.* 33). She then tells him what she says he knows already, namely what he has done to harm her (*Sgsk.* 34).

Her argument in *Sgsk.* 34–41 sounds surprisingly modern: she says that she enjoyed wealth and independence at Atli's court and had no desire to marry at all until the three *Giúcingar* 'sons of Gjúki' (i.e. Gjúki's sons Gunnarr and Högni and his son-in-law Sigurðr) came visiting, but that then Atli threatened to deprive her of all her property unless she agreed to marry (*Sgsk.* 36). She considered military resistance against her own brother, but rejected the idea because of the bad reputation it would have brought on the family (*Sgsk.* 37), so agreed to marry Sigurðr (*Sgsk.* 38), with whom she now compares Gunnarr unfavourably, *þó þiccz ér þiððkonungar* 'even if you think you are kings of nations' (and she implies, even though they tricked or forced her into marrying Gunnarr [*Sgsk.* 39]). But Atli, she says, will find out her constancy to Sigurðr when he hears of her suicide, and will understand that no spiritless woman should take away another woman's husband; then her griefs will be avenged (*Sgsk.* 40–41).

Brynhildr's main complaint here is that she has been deprived of her independence by a dishonest male conspiracy between Gunnarr, Sigurðr and Atli. This is of course true, but although she has equal reason to resent the behaviour of all three men, she is inhibited by her claim of devotion towards Sigurðr from blaming him, while family obligation clearly prevents her from taking action against her brother Atli. Therefore she transfers all her resentment against them into a concentrated rage against her husband Gunnarr, and even her suicide becomes in part a device to bring down Atli's vengeance on him. Her anger against him is certainly magnificent, even if less than wholly fair, but although the poet says that Sigurðr would have married Brynhildr himself if he could have done (*Sgsk.* 3), there is no statement in this poem that she had any claim on him before his marriage to Guðrún.²⁰ One might take a prior betrothal to be implied when Brynhildr says that no spiritless woman should take away another woman's husband, since she clearly means that Guðrún ought not to have deprived her of Sigurðr. But betrothal was a serious, formal and legalistic matter in Norse society, and self-betrothal by a woman, though possible, was disreputable.²¹ In any case, a betrothal required witnesses, not merely a pact in bed between the two parties like the one implied by Brynhildr in *Sgsk.* 68,5–8,²² so the poem's first audience would probably not have regarded an informal betrothal as valid and we cannot assume that their sympathies would have been unequivocally with Brynhildr at this point. The alternative interpretation, that Brynhildr thinks of Sigurðr as her fated husband, of whom she was wrongfully deprived simply

because Guðrún had already married him, would imply an egocentric attitude on Brynhildr's part that would make her even less sympathetic.

Nor is she universally popular at the Burgundian court, even if Gunnarr is besotted with her (and yet at the same time resentful of her contempt for him). His frantic attempts to prevent her suicide meet with only half-hearted support from some of his own men (*Sgsk.* 42,5–8), and with a flat refusal to help from Högni:

‘Letia maðr hána langrar gongo,
þars hon aprborin aldri verði!
Hon kröng of komz fyr kné móður,
hon æ borin óvilja til,
morgom manni at móðtrega’.²³
(*Sgsk.* 45,3–12)

‘Let no one hinder her from the long
journey from which may she never
be brought back!
She came perverse to her mother’s
knee,
she has always been born for disaster,
to bring grief of heart to many a person’.

She sweeps aside Gunnarr’s attempts to save her life (*Sgsk.* 43) and stabs herself with a sword (*Sgsk.* 47). She expresses contempt for those of her servants who prefer not to die with her: she does not want anyone to accompany her reluctantly, but their funerals will not now have the splendour which they might have shared in hers (*Sgsk.* 51–52). She then prophesies the futures that lie in store for Gunnarr and Guðrún, with evident contempt for both of them (*Sgsk.* 53–64),²⁴ before asking that she and Sigurðr should be burned on the same funeral pyre, along with large amounts of splendid equipment (including shields, hawks, tapestries and bedclothes), the five slave-girls and eight serving men of good family who were given to her by her father Buðli,²⁵ and with the same naked sword that lay between them:

‘þá er við bæði beð einn stigom
oc hétom þá hiona nafni’.
(*Sgsk.* 68,5–8)

‘when we both climbed into one bed
and were called then by the name of
man and wife’.

It also has to be said that Brynhildr’s arrangements for her funeral are rather egocentric. One might have expected to see in them an attempt to assert that she is Sigurðr’s real wife, but she goes beyond that, almost to the extent of taking over his funeral rather than sharing in it. The splendid trappings and the dead servants are all hers, and the magnificence of their reception in the next world will be guaranteed:

‘ef hánom fylgir ferð mín heðan’
(*Sgsk.* 69,5–6)

‘if my travelling party accompanies
him hence’

The assertion seems to be, not so much ‘I was really his wife’ as ‘He was really my husband’.

Guðrún’s role in these two poems is small in comparison with that of Brynhildr. In *Brot* she waits outside for Sigurðr to come home, and is the passive recipient of Högni’s announcement of the murder (*Brot* 6–7), and she briefly curses Gunnarr (*Brot* 11,5–8). It seems probable that she was also guilty of a breach of confidence, in the lost part of the poem, when she showed Brynhildr the ring which Sigurðr had taken from Brynhildr when he impersonated Gunnarr in her bed.²⁶ The ring episode is not included in *Sgsk.*, but Guðrún’s role remains passive. She is the victim of a tragic reversal of fortune when she wakes up in bed drenched in her husband’s blood (*Sgsk.* 24,5–8), and is then the recipient of a strange dying speech from Sigurðr in which he says that her brothers still live, that his own son will be killed, that Brynhildr has caused the trouble because she loved him better than anyone else, and that he himself has kept his oaths to Gunnarr (*Sgsk.* 25–28). This is a strange sort of consolation; it adds to Guðrún’s grief by foretelling the murder of her son as well as her husband and recognising the passion of Brynhildr, and its only positive points are that her brothers are still alive (but they are the murderers) and that he himself has been loyal to her. Her cry of grief as he dies (*Sgsk.* 29) is not surprising, but it is again the cry of a passive victim, and we see no more of her in the poem after that except for three statements made about her by Brynhildr:

1. That a spiritless woman should not take away another woman’s husband (*Sgsk.* 41,1–4).
2. That Guðrún will soon be reconciled to Gunnarr (*Sgsk.* 54), persuaded to marry Atli (*Sgsk.* 56), and that after killing him (*Sgsk.* 60) she will survive to weep again when her daughter Svanhildr is murdered (*Sgsk.* 62–64).
3. That if Guðrún had had as much courage as Brynhildr herself, it would have been more honourable for her to die with her first husband than to allow herself to be married again (*Sgsk.* 61).

All of this implies the same consistent view on Brynhildr’s part: that Guðrún is a spiritless victim who lacks moral courage.

But this is an unashamedly heathen point of view, as the panoply of Brynhildr’s funeral arrangements proclaims, and we should not be deceived into uncritical admiration for it just because it looks magnificent. It may have had a continuing appeal for some medieval Christians, but that appeal must have been to some extent illicit, and it is not surprising that sympathy shifts in the later poems. *Gðr. II* is mainly concerned with how Guðrún was persuaded to re-marry, but even the short section of it that is concerned with Sigurðr’s

death and her reaction to it (*Gðr.II* 3–12) ignores Brynhildr completely. The narrative substance of these stanzas is largely drawn from earlier poems, especially *Brot*: the killing takes place in the woods, the horse Grani mourns over his dead master, it is Hǫgni who tells Guðrún about the murder, and she curses him (not Gunnarr, as in *Brot*). The only addition of substance is that she goes to the woods to mourn over Sigurðr's body.

But all the details are told in Guðrún's words and from her point of view, so it is not surprising that they are seen in a new, more emotional way. The horse Grani does not merely mourn over Sigurðr's body, as in *Brot* 7, but is said to have come home covered in sweat after being ridden by the murderers, and to have drooped his head in the knowledge of his master's death when the weeping Guðrún went to see him (*Gðr.II* 4–5). In *Brot* 6–7 Guðrún is told about the murder as soon as Hǫgni gets home, but in *Gðr.II* 6–7 she says that nobody told her anything for a long time, until she directly asked Gunnarr about Sigurðr, to be met with silence by Gunnarr and an answer only from Hǫgni. The brief statement about the murder in *Brot* 7 is developed into a short but harrowing scene in *Gðr.II* 7–10: she says that Hǫgni added that Sigurðr had killed Guttormr, but that he had been struck down and given to wolves (*Gðr.II* 7), and that ravens, eagles and wolves were now feasting on her husband (*Gðr.II* 8). Guðrún says that she asked (reasonably enough, in view of Hǫgni's apparent callousness) why he wanted to tell her this, and hoped that ravens might tear his heart (*Gðr.II* 9); Hǫgni retorted *af trega stórom* 'in great grief', as she now admits, that she would have more to weep about when that came to pass (*Gðr.II* 10). She then went to the woods, not to find Sigurðr's body, but only what the wolves had left of it. She sat over the remains in the utter darkness of night, wishing that the wolves would kill her or that she could be burned like a piece of birch wood, but not crying out like other women (*Gðr.II* 11–12). Most of the narrative here is traditional: even the detail that Guðrún did not cry out may be borrowed from the statement in *Atlakviða* 38 that she never wept for her brothers or for the children she had borne to Atli. But this traditional material is infused with imaginative detail which vividly heightens the sense of Guðrún's intense memory of her suffering. There is no dignified glossing over of the gory physical details, such as we find, for example in *Atlakviða*; here, even heroes can have their dead bodies mutilated by carrion birds and beasts, and even murderers may be deeply distressed at what they have felt compelled to do.

In *Gðr.I* the focus on Guðrún's grief as the main subject of the poem becomes even more complete, so that all the details of the story that are not relevant to it are omitted. In this poem we never learn whether Sigurðr was killed in bed or in the woods, whether he made a dying speech, or how Guðrún learned of his death. Everything is narrowed down to the scene of her grieving

over the body (apparently indoors rather than in the woods, though we are never explicitly told); and besides Guðrún and Brynhildr, three new characters are introduced, all female. The passing statement in *Gðr:II* 11,5–8 that Guðrún did not weep like other women becomes a major psychological feature of the poem: it is implied that she will die if she cannot express her grief, and the first half of the poem is devoted to efforts to overcome her silence. First, two older women invented by the poet try to make her weep by relating their own sorrows: her aunt Gjaflaug says that she has experienced the loss of five husbands, three daughters, three sisters and eight brothers (*Gðr:I* 4). She is then ‘outbid’ by Herborg, Queen of the Huns, who has lost a husband and seven sons in battle and her parents and four brothers by drowning, besides having been enslaved and terrorised by her jealous mistress (*Gðr:I* 6–10). But this rather crude misery contest is interrupted by Guðrún’s sister Gullrönd, another invented character, who plucks away the cloth covering Sigurðr’s body and tells Guðrún to look at the corpse of her beloved and to kiss it (*Gðr:I* 13). This is what finally makes Guðrún melt into tears. Gullrönd then has a single stanza of tribute to the love between Guðrún and Sigurðr:

Pá hvað þat Gullrönd, Giúca dóttir:
 ‘Ycrar vissa ec ástir mestar
 manna allra fyr mold ofan;
 unðir þú hvárki úti né inni,
 systir mín, nema hiá Sigurði.’
 (*Gðr:I* 17)

Then Gullrönd spoke, daughter of
 Gjúki:
 ‘I knew that you two shared the
 greatest love
 of all people above the ground;
 you were neither happy outside or
 inside,
 my sister, except beside Sigurðr’.

This prompts Guðrún to find words in which to express her love and admiration for Sigurðr and her grief at his death (*Gðr:I* 18–22), and for this Brynhildr curses Gullrönd, wishing that she may never enjoy husband or children because she has persuaded Guðrún to weep and express her sorrow (and, it seems to be implied, has thereby saved Guðrún’s life). Gullrönd retorts that Brynhildr is ill-fated to princes and the worst ruiner of friendships among women (*Gðr:I* 24).²⁷

Guðrún herself has again a much more passive role, although she is not seen here merely as a spineless victim. In the first half of the poem we see her silent and motionless, unable to weep (*Gðr:I* 1–2, 5, 11), then dissolving into the tears that are necessary to prevent her from dying of grief (*Gðr:I* 14–16). When she does speak, it is only to praise Sigurðr (*Gðr:I* 18), to bewail her loss (*Gðr:I* 19–20), to recall Gunnarr’s broken oaths (but more in sorrow for the disastrous consequences they will have than in anger, *Gðr:I* 21), and to recall the happy

past that they all enjoyed together before the ill-fated expedition to woo Brynhildr (*Gðr.I* 22) – and even against Brynhildr she expresses no explicit resentment. She remains throughout a passive focus of sympathetic attention, almost as icon-like as a picture of the Virgin with the body of the dead Christ in her arms, never aggressive whatever the provocation, and even having her arguments pursued for her by proxy in the character of Gullrǫnd (who may have been invented in part to relieve Guðrún herself of the need to get involved in any dispute). By today's standards, it is a deeply unfashionable portrayal of the heroine, but it obviously fits the new ideals and emotional outlook of aristocratic people in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, and it is hard not to feel moved by it.

The brief appearance of Brynhildr in this poem looks by contrast like a parody of the tough, contemptuous female of *Sgsk.*; her curse on Gullrǫnd may reflect the heroic view that Guðrún ought properly to die on her husband's funeral pyre and have done with it, or it may be seen as motivated by pure malice against Guðrún. Gullrǫnd's reply levels two accusations against Brynhildr:

‘urðr qðlinga hefir þú æ verið;
rekr þic alda hverr illrar scepno,
sorg sára síau konunga,
oc vinspell vífa mest’.
(*Gðr.I* 24,5–12)

‘You’ve always been the destruction
of princes
every wave of ill fortune brings you,
you grievous sorrow of seven kings
and greatest breaker of friendship of
women’.

Her first accusation is that Brynhildr has caused destruction to the male characters, which is obviously broadly true, although even if we include the disasters that have not yet happened at this point in the story it is quite hard to list seven ‘kings’ who have been or will be destroyed by her.²⁸ Her second charge now seems ambiguous, and may always have been so: in calling Brynhildr *vinspell vífa mest*, Gullrǫnd may merely mean that of all women she has been the greatest causer of broken friendships between men, with the conventional (rather male-centred) view that it is the business of aristocratic women to promote peace. But it could equally mean that Brynhildr has been the greatest breaker of friendships between women; this would parallel the accusation of destructiveness towards men and suggest the more interesting criticism that the violently self-assertive female is as destructive to the happiness of other women as she is to the lives of men. Since Gullrǫnd is a benevolent character who has no self-interest of her own to pursue, it seems likely that the poet intended both charges to be taken seriously.

Brynhildr's defence is, characteristically, to blame a man: the whole trouble, she says, was caused by her brother Atli, because it was his greed for the Burgundians' gold that led him to perpetrate the trick for which she has had to pay so heavily (*Gðr.I* 25–26). Atli's greed is a major motivation in several eddic poems, but it hardly seems a sufficient explanation here, for Brynhildr was not compelled to demand the death of Sigurðr. The poem ends with Brynhildr sending fire from her eyes and spitting poison as she stares at Sigurðr's wounds (*Gðr.I* 27), as if she were figuratively transformed into a dragon. This suggests the fierce satisfaction of the desire for vengeance rather than anything like sorrow or love.

The end of *Gðr.I* may present Brynhildr as a caricature of the aggressive, vengeful female, but there is one late poem which does allow her to defend herself. This is *Hlr.*, in which she replies to the accusations of an ogress (*gygr*) who comes out of a stone to try to prevent her from travelling to join Sigurðr in the world of the dead. The supernatural figure who lives in a stone may have been an image of death and/or sterility, and certainly represented the heathen past,²⁹ but the accusations she makes seem to be motivated by ordinary human morality. They are:

1. That Brynhildr ought to pay attention to her weaving rather than going to visit another woman's husband (*Hlr.* 1,5–8).
2. That she has washed human blood from her hands (*Hlr.* 2,5–8).
3. That she has ruined the descendants of Gjúki (*Hlr.* 4,5–8).

Brynhildr's initial response to the first two accusations (*Hlr.* 3) ignores the first charge, replies to the second by saying that the hag must not blame her for having gone on Viking expeditions in her youth, and implicitly questions the hag's right to question her by asserting her superior birth. So far, her reply is thoroughly unsatisfactory: she does not answer the charge which questions her right to be travelling to see Sigurðr at all, and early audiences would probably have assumed that the accusation that she has washed blood from her hands related to her responsibility for the killing of Sigurðr, so that her answer about Viking expeditions looks deliberately evasive. Furthermore, her assertion of superior birth is irrelevant: if the charges against her are true, it ought to make no difference who voices them, and her assertion of superior birth merely makes her look arrogant.

It is not surprising that the hag responds with a more specific accusation in *Hlr.* 4, but Brynhildr then responds a second time with a speech that occupies the rest of the poem (*Hlr.* 5–14). Her initial response is that Gjúki's heirs showed a lack of love towards her and broke their oaths (*Hlr.* 5), and the implication that

they therefore deserved their fate seems not unreasonable. However, Brynhildr's response is then complicated by a section in which she tells of her early career as a valkyrie, and how Óðinn punished her for killing the wrong king in battle (*Hlr.* 8) by enclosing her with shields and fire at Scatalundr, decreeing that only the man who knew no fear and who could bring her Fáfnir's gold could ride over it (*Hlr.* 9–10). She was subsequently released by Sigurðr (who is here referred to as a Danish viking, *Hlr.* 11,7), and they slept in the same bed for eight nights, but without any sexual contact (*Hlr.* 12). This narrative seems to be derived from the story of *Sigrdrífumál*, and the poet, like the author of *Völsunga saga*,³⁰ identifies the originally distinct Sigrdrífa with Brynhildr. Brynhildr adds that she remained unaware that she had been tricked into marriage with Gunnarr until Guðrún reproached her with having slept with Sigurðr (*Hlr.* 13) – the implication being that she married Gunnarr under the impression that it was he who had ridden the wall of fire, and that this poet has elided the riding of the wall of fire and the deceptive wooing into a single occasion. She reflects that women and men are born to terrible strife, asserts that she and Sigurðr must never part, and orders the hag to sink down (*Hlr.* 14).

It seems, therefore, that Brynhildr is finally able to overcome the opposition of the hag, and we must assume that she will now join Sigurðr in the realm of Hel, but whether her response amounts to a justification of her actions or merely to an assertion of her will remains in doubt. Unlike the situation in *Sgsk.*, which concentrates on her misery when Sigurðr is already married to Guðrún, the bulk of her autobiographical account here focuses on her past as a valkyrie, presumably because this explains how Sigurðr won her by riding the wall of fire, and therefore why she regards him rather than Gunnarr as her true husband. But while this might explain why he should have a right to possess her, he clearly has not done so, as they slept together in one bed only *sem hann minn bróðir um borinn væri* 'as if he had been born my brother' (*Hlr.* 12,3–4). It does not necessarily follow from this that she has a right to possess him. One enigmatic detail early in her story of her life complicates the matter:

‘var ec vetra tólf, ef þic vita lystir,
er ec ungom gram eiða seldac’.
(*Hlr.* 6,5–8)

‘I was twelve years old, if you want
to know,
when I gave oaths to the young
prince’.

It is not clear who is meant here, but as this detail appears just before her account of the valkyrie career in which she gave victory to Agnarr, brother of Auða,³¹ it is possible that she swore to protect Agnarr in battle, which might imply a devotion to him resembling that of the valkyrie Sigrún for Helgi in

Helgakviða Hundingsbana II.³² In that case, Sigurðr has not been her only love, or the only subject of her vows. But it remains possible that this poet thought that Sigrðrifa / Brynhildr had met Sigurðr before she became a valkyrie, and in that case these (presumably mutual) vows would give her a prior claim to Sigurðr's loyalty.³³ But this remains very uncertain, and her implied assertion that Sigurðr is her 'real' husband, on which her right to join him in death depends, may not have been regarded as justified; and even if it was, she has not answered the hag's implied accusation that she has effectively washed from her hands the blood of the man she claims to love. The symbolic details in this curious poem, notably the association of the hag with infertility and death and the apparent triumph of Brynhildr at the end, seem to suggest that our sympathies should be with the assertive woman, but the logic of the arguments suggests a much more ambivalent attitude towards her.

There remains one other feature of some late eddic poems in which they differ markedly from the *Nibelungenlied*. This is their tendency towards telling a story by means of detailed prophecy of future events. Among the poems that have been discussed here, this is explicit only in Brynhildr's prophecy in *Sgsk.* 53–64, though the future deaths of Gjúki's sons are probably also implied in *Gðr.I* 24 (see above), and it must also have been a feature of more than one scene in *meira*, from which it is preserved in *Völsunga saga* chs. 25 (Brynhildr's interpretation of Guðrún's dreams) and 29 (the conversation between Sigurðr and Brynhildr in which he seems to have foreknowledge of both their imminent deaths).³⁴ It is also found in the mouth of a male prophet in *Grípisspá* 5–52, where his uncle Grípir tells Sigurðr of the future course of his life and death.

Modern taste usually reacts against this device, because it destroys the possibility of narrative suspense later and because it seems to deprive the characters of any capacity to choose what actions they will take. This criticism has some validity as applied to *Völsunga saga*, where the events prophesied then ponderously take place. But in the surviving poems it is a substitute for narrative, not a prelude to it, and can thus tell a story in a suspenseful way even if the audience already knows what must happen, because it switches attention onto the presumed reactions of the person to whom the prophecy is being told, who is always personally affected by it. Secondly, prophecy can include events after the death of the speaker but including his or her attitude towards them, and this would be difficult to contrive in any other way. Finally, when the device was used by medieval Catholic poets who themselves believed in Free Will, it emphasised the distance between the fictional characters, whose pre-Christian credentials are proved by their belief in an absolute Fate, and the poet's audience, who had no such belief; this could give the narrative the glamour of apparent antiquity.

But although the appearance of antiquity seems to have been valued, the eddic poets of this period were in fact, like the author of the *Nibelungenlied*, narrowing the distance between their ancient material and their contemporary audience. Gradually, they adapted the old social themes of duty and family pride into new ones in which personal emotion was becoming dominant. Most of the poems I have discussed are probably not late enough to have been directly influenced by romance, since the earliest Old Norse romance is thought to be Brother Robert's translation of the *Tristan* of Thomas, which was made for King Hákon Hákonarson of Norway in 1226.³⁵ But female characters do reflect a changing ideal of womanhood that seems compatible with romance attitudes (and which may have been influenced by lives of female saints), in which the heroic, and to our ears feminist Brynhildr is gradually displaced by the passive and devoted wife and widow Guðrún. I do not think that this has anything to do with any battle between the sexes; one or other of the two women is probably to be seen as admirable in every one of these poems, with the possible exception of *Hlr*. It is simply that ideas of what was admirable in a woman were changing. A similar tension between old and new views of the heroine can also be seen in the *Nibelungenlied*, but there the altered story requires Kriemhilt to represent both ideals and leaves no distinct emotional identity for Prünhilt. In the eddic poems the two ideals remain distinct and contrasted, and the new delineation of emotional character in both is an important literary achievement. Because women were (as they often are even today) less inhibited than men by a requirement to appear stoical, it is not surprising that it is the female characters who spring most vividly to life and who tend to dominate the late Norse poems.

NOTES

- 1 *Das Nibelungenlied*, ed. Bartsch and de Boor (1979), 166–76; trans. Hatto (1965), 133–40.
- 2 *Piðreks saga af Bern*, ed. Bertelsen (1905–11), II, 267; trans. Haymes (1988), ch. 348, p. 213.
- 3 For a good general statement of this view, see Liberman (1995).
- 4 For the texts, see N-K; English translations in this article are mine, but see also Orchard (2011). For the argument on the relative dating of these poems, see Andersson (1980), 108–20; see also Jónas Kristjánsson (1997), 59–64.
- 5 *Brot* is discussed among the older heroic poems by Einar Ólafur Sveinsson (1962), 412–15.
- 6 *Sigurðarkviða in skamma* is discussed among the younger heroic poems by Einar Ólafur Sveinsson (1962), 513–23.

- 7 ed. and trans. Finch (1965), 42–57; trans. Byock (1990), 73–88; for a detailed reconstruction of its contents, see Andersson (1980), 37–44.
- 8 For *Guðrúnarkviða II*, see Einar Ólafur Sveinsson (1962), 484–89, among the younger heroic poems.
- 9 For *Guðrúnarkviða I*, see Einar Ólafur Sveinsson (1962), 493–99.
- 10 See Einar Ólafur Sveinsson (1962), 523–25.
- 11 ‘Short lines’ here are equivalent to half-lines in the Old English, Old High German and Old Saxon poetic traditions; it has become conventional to number Old Norse Eddic verse in terms of them rather than in pairs.
- 12 Dronke I, 214–17 demonstrates that the *lausavísur* of the late-ninth-century skaldic poet Torf-Einarr show clear echoes of *Hamðismál* stt. 15, 30 (and possibly also of *Hamðismál* 25). If Torf-Einarr’s verses are authentic, therefore, *Hamðismál* must have been fairly widely familiar at the end of the ninth century.
- 13 There are 29 poems in the Codex Regius of the Poetic Edda, all of which include some direct speech. Two (*Völuspá* and *Sigrdrífumál*) consist largely or wholly of prophecy or advice from non-human females; of the other 27, only nine have more speech for women than for men (and of these, we should perhaps exclude *Brot*, much of which is lost). Apart from the poems discussed in this paper, these are *Oddrúnargrátr*, *Guðrúnarkviða III*, *Atlamál* and *Guðrúnarhvat*, all of which probably date from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries (on the first two, see Andersson [1980], 123–27 and 120–21; on the latter two, Dronke I, 107–12, 150–54); however, Fidjestøl’s criterion of dating by the generally decreasing frequency of the expletive particle *um / of* (Fidjestøl [1999], 224) produces anomalously high frequencies for *Oddrúnargrátr* and *Guðrúnarkviða I*, though its results for the other poems are more or less as one would have expected, with *Atlamál* showing a lower frequency than any other eddic poem. A particularly instructive contrast in the handling of dialogue is that between *Atlakviða*, which probably dates from before ca. 950 (see Dronke I, 42–55) and *Atlamál* (probably twelfth century, see Dronke I, 107–12), which both tell the same story. In the earlier poem, 114 lines are spoken by men and 48 by one woman (*Guðrún*), while in the later one, 196 lines are spoken by men and 234 by three different women. It seems that with the doubtful exception of *Brot*, a majority of female speech is a feature found only in the later eddic poems.
- 14 Among many other examples, when *Grettir* is told in a single day that his father and brother have been killed and that he himself has been outlawed, *Svá segja menn, at Grettir brygði engan veg skapi við þessar fréttir ok var jafn glaðr sem áður* ‘People say that *Grettir*’s mood did not change in any way at this news, and he was as cheerful as before’ (ed. Guðni Jónsson [1936], ÍF 7, 148; trans. Fox and Hermann Pálsson [1974], 97); in *Njáls saga* chs. 53–54 (ed. Einar Ólafur Sveinsson [1954], ÍF 12, 134–39; trans. Cook [1997], 63–66), the false imputation

that Gunnarr had wept after having his ear damaged by one of Otkell's spurs is considered such a serious slander that he is justified in killing those responsible for it.

- 15 See *Völsunga saga* ch. 28 (ed. Finch [1965], 47), where the motif of the potion seems to have been derived from *meira*: see Andersson (1980), 44–46, 50–53, 60–66.
- 16 Andersson (1980), 28. For a different view, see Hallberg (1975), 80, who sees her as motivated by a mixture of triumph and desperation, pouring her contempt and hatred on Gunnarr. But this may be to read into *Brot* the emotions that are explicit in *Sgsk.*.
- 17 Andersson (1980), 39, derived from *Völsunga saga* ch. 31 (ed. and trans. Finch [1965], 53), where Brynhildr refers to her oath to love 'only the man who was noblest born (*er ágæztr væri alinn*), and that is Sigurðr'.
- 18 For this motivation, derived from the end of *Völsunga saga* ch. 31 (ed. and trans. Finch [1965], 57), see Andersson (1980), 27.
- 19 But for a different view see Jónas Kristjánsson (1997), 62–63, who thinks she is guiltless and finds her 'great-hearted, consistent and unblemished'; perhaps, however, she may be impressive without being admirable.
- 20 For discussion of this point, see Andersson (1980), 31–33 and references. Andersson shows that *Sgsk.* 39,1–3 should be translated 'I then betrothed (or 'committed') myself to the gold-adorned one who sat on Grani's back', but the clear implication of *Sgsk.* 2–4, 68 is that this commitment took place during the proxy wooing, when Sigurðr was already married to Guðrún. It is not, as in the *Nibelungenlied* (Âv. 6, stt. 332–35; ed. Bartsch and de Boor [1979], 61–62; trans. Hatto [1965], 53–54), a condition of Sigurðr's marriage that he obtain Brynhildr for Gunnarr.
- 21 For the formal nature of betrothal see e.g. *Gunnlaugs saga* ch. 4 (ed. Foote and Quirk [revised 1974], 23–24; trans. Attwood, *CSI* I, 310); for the disrepute associated with self-betrothal by a woman, see e.g. *Bandamanna saga* ch. 4 (ed. Magerøy [1981], 6–7; trans. Ellison [1997], *CSI* 5, 286–87).
- 22 *Grágás*, the Icelandic republican law that was in force until 1264, makes it clear that betrothals without witnesses are not valid: *Öll skulu kaup haldast með mönnum vottlaus nema fjögur: Ef maður kaupir land, eða goðorð, eða hafskip, eða fastnar sér konu*. 'All bargains between people are binding without witnesses, except for four: if someone buys land, or a chieftaincy, or a sea-going ship, or betroths a woman to himself' (*Grágás*, *Festabáttr* ch. 64, ed. Gunnar Karlsson et al. [1997], 153).
- 23 Corrected from N-K's *mǫðtrega*, an obvious typographic error.
- 24 There is, however, one moment when she allows herself and Gunnarr a brief glimpse of a happier relationship that might have been and seems to blame Fate

rather than her husband, when she says that Atli's sister Oddrún will love Gunnarr *sem ec skyldac, / ef ocr góð um scöpp gerði verða* 'as I should have done if a good fate had been granted to us' (*Sgsk.* 58,8–10).

- 25 It is not clear whether or not these attendants have had any choice about accompanying her in death.
- 26 See Andersson (1980), 27, derived from *Völsunga saga* ch. 30, ed. and trans. Finch (1965), 51.
- 27 Or possibly 'of all women the greatest breaker of friendships', see below.
- 28 The three 'kings' for whose deaths Brynhildr has already been responsible at this point are Sigurðr, his son and Guttormr, to which we may add the future deaths of Gunnarr and Högni. This poet probably knew a tradition in which Gjúki had five sons (cf. *Brot* 9,5–8 and *Sgsk.* 18,9), and possibly one in which the remaining two, Gernoz and Gislher, died along with their brothers in the expedition to visit Atli, as happens in *Piðreks saga*: Gernoz dies in ch. 412 (ed. Bertelsen [1905–11], II, 322; trans. Haymes [1988] ch. 389, p. 237) and Gislher in ch. 413 (ed. Bertelsen [1905–11], II, 323–24; trans. Haymes [1988], ch. 390, p. 237). They also die in the *Nibelungenlied*: Gernot in Äv. 37, st. 2221 (ed. Bartsch and de Boor [1979], 348; trans. Hatto [1965], 274), and Giseler in Äv. 38, stt. 2297–98 (ed. Bartsch and de Boor [1979], 359; trans. Hatto [1965], 282); this would make up the number to seven.
- 29 Cf. the figure of King Sveigðir in *Ynglingatal* 2 (*Skj* I B, 7; Kock I, 4) and *Ynglinga saga* ch. 12 (ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson [1941], ÍF 26, 27–28), who is lured into pursuing a dwarf into the rock inside which he lives; further see McKinnell (2005), 70–71. For the idea that spirits who live in stones are devils and the opponents of Christianity, see the story of Koðrán Eilífsson's patron *spámaðr* in *Porvalds þáttir víðfjrla I*, ch. 3 (ed. Sigurgeir Steingrímsson, Ólafur Halldórsson and Peter Foote [2003], ÍF 15:2, 61–69).
- 30 Cf. *Völsunga saga* ch. 21 (ed. and trans. Finch [1965], 35; trans. Byock [1990], 67).
- 31 Cf. also *Sigrdrífumál*, the verse quatrain embedded in the prose paragraph between stt. 4 and 5 (N-K 190).
- 32 See SG III.ii, 284.
- 33 See also Einar Ólafur Sveinsson (1962), 524–25, who also suggests that the text of this poem (which also appears, minus st. 7, in *Norna-Gests þáttir* ch. 9, *FSN* I, 183–84) is very unreliable.
- 34 See *Völsunga saga* chs. 26–27, 31, ed. and trans. Finch (1965), 45–46, 55, trans. Byock (1990), 77–78, 86–88; Andersson (1980), 37–38, 42.
- 35 See the colophon to *Tristrams saga*, ed. Vésteinn Ólason (1987), 7; ed. and trans. Peter Jorgensen in ed. Kalinke (1999), 28–29.

11 Two Sex Goddesses: Þorgerðr Hølgabrúðr and Freyja in *Hyndluljóð*

I. Þorgerðr Hølgabrúðr

One of the most interesting questions raised in Lotte Motz's *The Beauty and the Hag* concerns the evidence for the veneration of giantess-figures in Scandinavia in the late heathen period, and central to this discussion is the figure of Þorgerðr Hølgabrúðr.¹ In this paper I shall collect the sources about her, consider what kind of figure she was, and suggest that some understanding of cults like hers may also be gained from the much later eddic poem *Hyndluljóð*.

The surviving accounts of Þorgerðr or episodes about her that I have found (some of which are preserved in more than one source, and also including two uncertain cases) are summarised in Appendix I. The first point to make about them, however, is that none of those which name Þorgerðr directly was actually composed by a heathen author; it is therefore natural that all the major accounts of her are to a greater or lesser extent coloured by Christian prejudice against idolatry and sacrifice, especially where she is opposed, thwarted or overthrown by the hero of the narrative, as it were with Christian hindsight. A number of the physical details also seem historically improbable – it is, for example, uncertain whether there were any purpose-built temples either in Norway or in Iceland,² though there probably were idols with rudimentary shelters over them, and certainly sacred sites in the open air. However, these Christian sources are so varied that it must seem unlikely that they are all based on each other, and probable that they represent variants within an actual tenth-century Norwegian cult.

To begin with a deceptively simple matter, Þorgerðr is a surprisingly ordinary, human name to be applied to a supernatural being; it may be easiest to explain it as derived from the name of *Gerðr*, the consort of Freyr, with the

prefix *Þor-* added to link this Vanir- or giant-connected being to the majority cult of the Æsir. This suggestion is strengthened by the likelihood that her name may sometimes have been shortened to *Þóra* or (if Tindr Hallkelsson means to refer to her) to *Gerðr*.³

Her appellative is more interesting. Its second element should clearly be *-brúðr*. The form *Hǫrgatröll*, applied to her in *Ketils saga Hængs*, is obviously influenced by its context in a story about an assembly of trolls, and the nouns *flagð* and *tröll*, applied to her and/or her sister in *Jómsvíkingadrápa* and *Jómsvíkinga saga*⁴ respectively, are not linked to Þorgerðr's name. The first might refer to either Þorgerðr or Irpa, and the second is merely the expected common noun in the context in which it appears. The element *-brúðr* might mean either 'bride' or more generally 'woman'; Snorri and the writer of *Flateyjarbók* ch. 173 take it to mean 'daughter'.

The first element of the name varies interestingly, sometimes even within a single source. It appears as:

hǫlda- ('of noblemen', in *Njáls saga*);

Hǫlga- (probably 'of Hálogaland' or 'of Hǫlgi', in *Skáldskaparmál*, *Jómsvíkingadrápa* and *Jómsvíkinga saga*, and cf. the male name *Hǫlgi* in Skúli Þorsteinsson's poem);

Hǫrða- (probably 'of Hǫrðaland' or 'of the Hǫrðalander(s)', in all the episodes in *Flateyjarbók*);

Hǫrga- ('of the shrines', in *Jómsvíkinga saga* and *Ketils saga Hængs*, and cf. the male name *Hǫrgi* in *Flateyjarbók* ch. 173).

Skúli Þorsteinsson mentions an ancestral male figure called *Hǫlgi*, and Snorri's *Skáldskaparmál* takes this to refer to Þorgerðr's father; Snorri adds that his mound was built from alternate courses of gold and silver and of earth and stone, that he was venerated along with her, and that Hálogaland was named after him. *Flateyjarbók* ch. 173 seems to interpret *Hǫrgi* as Þorgerðr's father in a similar way.

However, this male figure has no distinctive cult role, though *Hǫlgi* might have had a separate existence as the name of a tribal god⁵ or a title for the human head of a ruling family, derived from the name of the province.⁶ *Hǫrgi* would mean 'dweller in a heathen shrine', and might have existed separately as a nickname; and such a story of a father and daughter living apparently alone in a hall in a forest clearing (but actually with the mysterious support of forty men who live under the hall) can be seen in a Christianised form in *Þorvalds þátr tasalda*.⁷ However, even if such father and daughter stories existed separately, it still seems likely that both male names here are derived from the titles

of the goddess as ‘bride/woman of the people/ruler of Hálogaland’ or ‘bride/woman of the shrines’. The form *Hǫrðabrúðr* seems to connect her with a different province, Hǫrðaland, but in the same way as *Hǫlgabrúðr*.⁸

In most of the surviving stories about Þorgerðr, she is the patroness of Hákon jarl inn ríki, the last great defender of heathenism in Norway, who was killed in 995. Since his family were called the *Háleygjjar* and his major power base was in the Trøndelag (just to the south of Hálogaland), it would not be surprising if his tutelary goddess was called *Hǫlgabrúðr*. If this had been the unanimous form of the name, we might have been tempted to regard the stories about her as largely post-Conversion fictions which had grown up around the figure of the last great opponent of Christianity. However, the variety of name-forms, including one which associates Þorgerðr with a province which was not Hákon’s power-base, suggests that the stories go back to a cult which actually existed in the later tenth century in more than one western Norwegian province (and if we trust *Harðar saga*, in southern Iceland as well). This is confirmed by the use of the name *Hǫlgi* by Skúli, a pre-Christian poet.⁹

But did Skúli really think that *Hǫlgi* was the father of Þorgerðr? His kenning refers to treasure as *Hǫlga haugþak* ‘the thatch of *Hǫlgi*’s grave-mound’; *Hǫlgi* therefore seems to be a dead human ruler. Þorgerðr, on the other hand, is always portrayed as the idol of a deity, never as a figure in a grave-mound, and it would seem bizarre for such a supernatural being to be regarded as the daughter of a dead human ruler. It seems more likely that the element *-brúðr* actually meant ‘bride’ (its undoubted meaning in *göðbrúðr*¹⁰ and *skír brúðr goða*,¹¹ both applied to Skaði), and that the goddess was regarded as the sexual partner of the ruler and of his dead predecessors. This would explain why the idol of Þorgerðr in *Njáls saga* wears a *faldr* (the headdress normally worn by brides and married women),¹² and if Tindr Hallkelsson’s *Hákonardrápa* refers to her it would supply a specific reason for his ironic contrast between battle and sexuality in Hákon’s experience. It would also give political as well as religious point to the sharp questions posed by Óláfr Tryggvason in *Flateyjarbók* ch. 326: does any of his men want to buy a woman? Does one of them have some love for Þorgerðr himself? The King may be asking, not only whether his men have heathen leanings, but whether any of them has ambitions to be the partner of Þorgerðr as Hákon was (i.e. to be a heathen jarl). Similarly, the Christianised episode in *Ketils saga Hængs* occurs immediately after Ketill has foiled an attempt by the giantess *Forað* ‘danger, disaster’ to marry the jarl.

All the variants of Þorgerðr’s name make sense if we take it that she was regarded as the jarl’s sexual partner, and that the separate name *Hǫlgi* could be applied to him or to any of his dead predecessors. Óláfr Tryggvason makes this view of her explicit when his mockery of the idol includes the statement that she

has just lost a husband who was very dear to her (i.e. Hákon jarl). The sexual association with her chief worshipper seems to correspond, with the sexes reversed, to the idol of Freyr's 'marriage' with his priestess in *Gunnars þátr helmingis*,¹³ and the context in *Harðar saga* also suggests that she could be invoked for sexual fertility. That the dead ancestor was also regarded as her sexual partner need not surprise us, for *Ynglingatal* states that at least one of the dead fertility kings of that family now provides Hel with sexual enjoyment (explicitly in *Ynglingatal* 7, by implication in *Ynglingatal* 30, 31, 32),¹⁴ and *Grímnismál* 14 (N-K 60) claims that the fertility goddess Freyja takes half the slain each day (presumably with sexual motives, in view of her usual function and character).

Porgerðr is associated with treasure in the form of gold and silver, but it is certainly not her function to provide the jarl with these things – rather, he must make offerings of treasure to her in order to secure or keep her favour. This feature is found in *Skáldskaparmál*, *Flatexjarbók* chs. 114, 154–55, 326 and *Jómsvíkinga saga*; and in *Flatexjarbók* ch. 326 the Christian Óláfr Tryggvason seems to imply that she could be 'bought' like a prostitute – presumably, she was so covetous for gold and silver that both her divine favour and her sexual favours could be bought with it. This is again reminiscent of Freyja, who in *Sprla þátr* ch. 1 sleeps with each of four craftsman-dwarves in exchange for the Brisingamen (see *FSN* II, 97–98).

Snorri's statement in *Skáldskaparmál* ch. 45 that the funeral mound of Hólgi was made of alternate courses of gold and silver and of earth and stone (see Appendix I, B2) is obviously a hyperbole, but its meaning may perhaps be illustrated from the huge number of *guldgubber* discovered during the excavation of a high-status site at Sorte Muld on the Danish Baltic island of Bornholm.¹⁵ These thin gold (or occasionally silver or gold alloy) plates stamped with male and/or female figures (or in a few cases with the forms of animals) were clearly intended as religious offerings: many had been deliberately folded, sometimes into envelopes which enclosed other tiny pieces of gold. *Guldgubber* are rarely associated with burials, but at Sorte Muld they were apparently deposited among or over the ruins of a disused noble building, which may well have been associated either with the worship of a Vanic deity or with commemoration of a dead ancestor who was the 'partner' of a female deity of the Vanic type; if so, the dead 'husband' of the goddess may have been seen as participating in her wealth as part of his reward for devotion to her during life.¹⁶ This could explain Skúli Þorsteinsson's kenning *Hólga haugþak* (see Appendix I, A1), which simultaneously links gold and silver to images of a house and a funeral mound.

Porgerðr might sometimes (reluctantly) allow one of her worshippers the gift of a single ring (*Flatexjarbók* ch. 114), but this is probably merely a sign that she accepts him as her supporter,¹⁷ and anyone who takes a ring from her

or her relatives without permission is regarded as her enemy (*Njáls saga*, *Harðar saga*, all her treasure in *Flateyjarbók* ch. 326).

In return, Þorgerðr's worshippers seem to be rewarded with possession of their lands and (for a time) with survival – in *Harðar saga*, Grímkell dies just after losing her protection, and Hákon jarl evidently fears the same fate for himself during his battle against the Jómsvíkingar (*Flateyjarbók* chs. 154–55, *Jómsvíkinga saga*), and possibly also when he calls on her help to avert the magical danger to himself that arises from Þorleifr's poem in *Flateyjarbók* ch. 173. In both these stories, Þorgerðr demands a human sacrifice, in the first case probably as a substitute for Hákon himself. Perhaps her devotees may also have looked forward to sexual bliss with her after death, but the sources do not give explicit support for this.

Þorgerðr's cult shows a number of features which are reminiscent of the Vanir. She is strongly associated with wealth in gold and silver, and there is a suspicion that sex with her might be bought, as it can in the case of Freyja.¹⁸ In *Ketils saga hængs*, Þorgerðr is evidently to be met with out at sea, the traditional domain of Njörðr and the other Vanir;¹⁹ and in *Flateyjarbók* chs. 154–55 and *Jómsvíkinga saga*, Hákon jarl goes to a forest clearing on an island to invoke her, just as the shrine of Nerthus is said by Tacitus to have been in a grove on an island.²⁰ In *Flateyjarbók* she employs battle magic in a way that seems reminiscent of Gullveig and the Vanir in *Völuspá* 21–24 (N-K 5–6). Even her hailstorm in the battle against the Jómsvíkingar resembles the snowstorm encountered by Freyr and his entourage in *Gunnars þáttur helmings*,²¹ and there may be an ironic parallel with the function of the Vanir as gods of the corn in the weighing of her *haglkorn* (literally 'hail-corn') in *Jómsvíkinga saga*. Finally, her favourite, Hákon jarl, is to die in a concealed chamber under a pig-sty, while Freyja is also called *Sýr* 'Sow' (see below, note 30) and has a boar as her sacred animal (see below);²² and in *Flateyjarbók* ch. 326 her idol is burned along with that of Freyr.

On the other hand, some features of the Nerthus cult type are totally absent: most notably, there is no progress in a cart, and no period of peace associated with the goddess. Snorri does not say for what purpose sacrifice was made to her, though in the other stories she seems to be invoked both for military reasons and in connection with marriage or fertility. If Þorgerðr was a version of Freyja, therefore, we have to suppose that the cult of this goddess was subject to some change over time.

She is in fact never actually called a goddess,²³ although she seems to be among the deities worshipped by Grímkell in *Harðar saga*; it is said in *Skáldskaparmál* that sacrifice was made to her; and in *Njáls saga* she is apparently worshipped alongside Þórr. In *Ketils saga* and to her opponents in battle she is a troll-woman or *flagð* 'hag', while to Ólafr Tryggvason she is a *kona*

‘woman’ only in mockery, and in fact no more than a *líkneskja* ‘image’. It is hard to know whether her association with trolls is entirely due to Christian bias, or whether it reflects something of what her cult was like in reality; but according to *Flateyjarbók*, *Jómsvíkinga saga* and *Njáls saga* she has a sister called *Irpa* ‘the Swarthy One’.²⁴ Þorgerðr herself is not described as beautiful (unless we take it that Tindr Hallkelsson refers to her in *Hákonardrápa*, see Appendix I, A2) but she is said to be tall (*Njáls saga*) and splendidly dressed (*Flateyjarbók* chs. 114, 326), and it seems likely that the two figures contrasted with each other in appearance. *Irpa* looks like a tabu name for a figure whom it was considered unlucky to name directly; she may have been either a ‘dark’ aspect of Þorgerðr herself, or a figure of Hel. Perhaps these two possibilities may sometimes have become synonymous, just as in *Ynglinga saga* the figure of the predatory princess who destroys the Vanir-derived king tends to merge with that of Hel deriving sexual pleasure from him in the corresponding stanzas of *Ynglingatal*.

This line of thought may perhaps be strengthened by the story of Hákon jarl’s death told in *Flateyjarbók*: when Óláfr Tryggvason is pursuing him, he seeks help from one of his mistresses, Þóra of Rimul, who hides him in a secret chamber dug under a pig-sty, where he is eventually betrayed and stabbed by his thrall.²⁵ The underground chamber is reminiscent of a funeral mound, and as Hákon’s wife is also called Þóra, it may be that his wife and mistress have both taken on part of the name and nature of his goddess-partner; in that capacity Þóra may be seen as presiding over his death (though her intention on the narrative’s surface level is to save his life).²⁶

Þorgerðr seems to have originated as a local goddess (probably the family patroness of the Háleygjar, among others), and may have grown in popularity (or had her popularity recorded) because of the influence of Hákon jarl inn ríki in shoring up the last stage of heathenism in Norway. As such, she is not explicitly one of the Vanir, but she retains many of their features, and we may particularly note her role as family patroness and sexual partner of the chief, her possible role as death-bringer, and the fact that she has a ‘dark’ sister, who may be her alter-ego.

II. *Hyndluljóð*

All three of these features can also be seen in *Hyndluljóð*. This curious poem, preserved only in *Flateyjarbók*, preserves what may be the remains of two poems.²⁷ Snorri refers to the poem, or perhaps only to stt. 29–44, as ‘the shorter *Völuspá*’, and I shall ignore these stanzas here. The rest of the text contains a mythological framework and a quasi-legal central section; I shall concentrate on the narrative framework section, which is summarised in Appendix II. It

tells how Freyja helps her lover Óttarr to obtain from a giantess or troll-woman called Hyndla the knowledge of his ancestry that he needs in order to assert his land rights in a legal dispute. Having given this information to Óttarr, Hyndla becomes abusive towards Freyja and threatens her with fire, but is defeated (or else Freyja destroys Hyndla with fire, see below).

This poem raises many problems: for example, how can Óttarr be on the road to Valhöll (stt. 5, 6) while he is evidently still a living man (since he is about to assert his inheritance rights)? Some interpreters have accordingly seen *Hyndluljóð* as a very late poem in which a more or less fanciful framework has been placed round the central claims of noble origin which were actually needed to reinforce a noble family's claim to its *óðal*, or ancestral land rights. But there are problems about this interpretation. On some level, Freyja is clearly a figure of derision – deceitful, lustful and foolish – and it is difficult to see how it would enhance the honour of Óttarr's family to derive their *óðal* right from her help.²⁸ If the poem were a later medieval construct without basis in 'genuine' myth, this difficulty would be all the greater, since Óttarr would appear merely as a foolish heathen and his goddess as morally disgraceful.

On the narrative level, there are further questions: it is clear that Freyja sets out to flatter, bribe and deceive Hyndla on Óttarr's behalf, but that the giantess is not fooled – so how is Hyndla persuaded to give Óttarr the information he needs? Why does Freyja persist in referring to Óttarr as her boar (st. 45) when it is clear that Hyndla knows his true identity? And why does Freyja need Hyndla, after her information has been given, to supply the 'ale of memory' for Óttarr?

If we take the framework of *Hyndluljóð* to be based on actual pre-Christian tradition, many of the problems disappear, and the poem can be viewed in a dual focus. From the post-Conversion position of the poet's own time, we have to accept Hyndla's point of view: Freyja does try to deceive her with a false pretence of friendship, and appears to be lying when she pretends that Óttarr is her boar; she clearly is motivated by love or lust for him, and Hyndla's suggestions of goat-like bestiality in her passion (stt. 46–47) must be regarded as accurate.

However, from the inherited viewpoint of a respected ancient tradition, the relationship between Óttarr and Freyja closely resembles that between Hákon jarl and Þorgerðr Hólgafrúðr. He has built her a temple, adorned it, and made sacrifice to her (st. 10) – and perhaps one might take this to imply that he has 'bought' her sexual favours, and that the theme of the prostitution of the goddess is again present. When Freyja claims that he is the gold-bristled boar Hildisvíni (st. 7),²⁹ she may be claiming a sacred function for him. Freyja herself has the by-name *Sýr* 'Sow';³⁰ and Freyr, too, has a sacred boar called Gullinbursti.³¹ Here, Óttarr apparently becomes the sacred boar (and perhaps, as consort-priest, a representative of Freyr, Freyja's brother and lover). When

she proposes that she and Hyndla discuss the families of princes, Freyja uses the word *igfra* (st. 8,3); it is a pity that we cannot now say whether this word retained any memory of its original sense of ‘boar’ (cf. OE *eofor*), since that would link Freyja’s concern about Óttarr’s family with her sexual concern for him as her ‘boar’ lover; but if not, it is a strange coincidence.

In a sacred poetic metaphor, Óttarr as ‘boar’ was ‘made’ by the dwarfs *Dáinn* (‘the Dead’) and *Nabbi* (‘Mound’). Perhaps this admits the truth of Hyndla’s implicit warning to Óttarr that he is Freyja’s *verr í valsinni* (‘lover on the way to the slain’, st. 6,6), in that she will claim him when he is slain. In a similar way, *Grímnismál* 14 claims that Freyja takes half the slain each day; and it was universally remembered that Hákon jarl had been killed in a mound-like chamber under a pig-sty.

Freyja may not be speaking purely figuratively when she calls Hyndla her sister in the cave (st. 1,3), for Þorgerðr also has a dark sister, Irpa (‘Swarthy’). In both cases, it looks as if there was a perception that the goddess is patroness of death as well as sexual partner and guarantor of possession of the land, and the dark sister probably represented a separation of the two functions. However, this separation does not remove the simultaneous perception that the sexual mistress is herself also the death-bringer; both are therefore potential sexual partners for the human protagonist.

Much becomes clearer if we assume that Hyndla and Freyja have in *Hyndluljóð* become rivals for Óttarr’s favour. This would explain Hyndla’s instant snarling hostility to Freyja, and why she is prepared to tell Óttarr his ancestry (ignoring Freyja while she does so). Presumably she is trying to demonstrate that she can be useful to him, and calls him *Óttarr heimsci* ‘Óttarr the foolish’ because he evidently prefers the sexually attractive but ignorant Freyja to the giantess who possesses the information he needs to assert his *óðal* right.

Assumption of a sexual rivalry between the two female figures also allows the post-Conversion poet to develop an entertaining comedy of hatred between them. Freyja may begin with a speech of honeyed persuasion, but when she produces the curious idea that she (a goddess!) will make sacrifice to Þórr so that he may favour Hyndla, we should undoubtedly call to mind the occasions on which Þórr has killed giant women;³² perhaps Freyja is hoping that he will do so again.

For her part, Hyndla has no hesitation in calling Freyja deceitful (st. 6,1) or in trying to suggest to Óttarr that his devotion to Freyja may hasten his own death – the apparent point of the retorts:

‘Seinn er góltr þinn goðveg troða’ (st. 5,5–6)

‘Your boar is slow in treading the way of the gods’

‘er þú hefir ver þinn í valsinni’ (st. 6,5–6)

‘When you have your lover on the way of the slain’

Freyja’s deviousness is also clear from the fact that we do not learn her ulterior purpose until stt. 9–10, when we already know that Óttarr is her lover. Some of her vocabulary may characterise her further: thus, the first half of st. 10 plays on the ambiguity of the word *steinn*, so that:

‘Hǫrg hann mér gerði hlaðinn steinom’³³

might mean either ‘He made a shrine for me, built up with (building) stones’ or ‘He caused my shrine to be piled high with gemstones’.³⁴ The next couplet:

‘nú er griót þat at gleri orðit’ (st. 10,3–4)

‘now that stone has turned to glass’

begins by resolving this ambiguity into building stone, but then transforms that into a precious, jewel-like substance.³⁵ Elsewhere in Old Norse verse, the noun *gler* is associated only with treasure or precious things,³⁶ and the (non-literal) poetic conceit of the stones transformed to glass by sacrificial fire points up the love of precious things that characterises both Freyja and Þorgerðr. The probable implication is that Óttarr has bought Freyja’s patronage and sexual favours with these sacrifices – one is reminded of Óláfr Tryggvason’s ironic question to his men whether any of them wants to ‘buy a woman’. In this opening framework, Hyndla is surly and must be assumed to be a repulsive hag, but we are also, from a slightly misogynistic Christian viewpoint, entertained by Freyja’s feminine duplicity, genteelly concealed lust and covetous preoccupation with precious offerings.

On Hyndla’s side, much of the closing framework consists of a scathing account of the sexual behaviour of her *eðlvina* ‘noble friend’ (st. 46,5 – a sarcastic echo of Freyja’s insincere *mín vina* ‘my friend’ in st. 1,2). She leaps about at night like Heiðrún going among the billy-goats – and the verb *hleypr* probably carries sexual connotations here (st. 46,5–8). There may also be a sarcastic reference to the request for the ‘ale of memory’, for according to *Grímnismál* 25 (N-K 62) and *Gylfaginning* ch. 39³⁷ it is from the udders of the she-goat Heiðrún that the mead flows for the *einherjar* to drink in Valhøll. Hyndla may be suggesting that if Óttarr wants a drink, he can get it from the ‘udders’ of

his bestial patroness. The goat here was probably originally a sacred fertility animal equivalent and alternative to the pig; but both Hyndla and her post-Conversion poet encourage us to take it in a more basic, bestial sense.

Hyndla continues by mentioning Freyja's passion for Óðr (cf. *Gylfaginning* ch. 35,³⁸ which tells how Freyja wept for the absence of her husband Óðr and went among unknown peoples searching for him). Hyndla doubtless intends this to show Freyja's unbridled passion for men, since she then asserts Freyja's general sexual availability and repeats the comparison with Heiðrún (st. 47). But it may also allow a more sympathetic view of Freyja's passion: Óðr is her lost husband, whose name may also mean 'intellect';³⁹ in this sense, it is right that she should yearn for him. Seen in this semi-allegorical way, Freyja's yearning is that of love for the mind – a reversed version of the myth of Cupid and Psyche,⁴⁰ and thus an expression of a love which is more sympathetic and civilised than anything Hyndla wishes to acknowledge. In that case, the ritual transformation of the fertility goddess into an animal reminds us that when we become 'animals' for this purpose, we are not *merely* animal. This may suggest that despite the temptation to poke fun at the lascivious goddess, the poet's sympathies ultimately rest more with Freyja than with her opponent.

On Freyja's side, the closing framework begins with her demand for the *minnisql* 'ale of memory', which Óttarr needs in order to remember all that he has been told. On one level, this is just a magic potion;⁴¹ but on another it may continue Freyja's suggestion in st. 10 that Óttarr worships more than one goddess, for a *minni* was also a toast drunk to one or more gods.⁴² And behind both may lurk another, more sinister meaning of the word, as a toast drunk to the dead.

But who is or are the dead here: Óttarr's ancestors, Óttarr himself, or someone else? When Hyndla sends Freyja away at the beginning of the next stanza, saying that she wants to sleep (st. 46,1–2), her behaviour resembles that of a reluctant *vplva* who has been raised from the dead and forced to reveal hidden information, as in *Baldrs draumar* 5 (N-K 277) and probably *Vpluspá* 66,8 (N-K 15), as Hyndla has just done. But instead of the grave compliments usually paid to Óðinn when he is recognised on such occasions (e.g. *Baldrs draumar* 13,1–4; *Vafþrúðnismál* 55,7–9),⁴³ Hyndla lets forth a stream of abuse, and according to the manuscript reading *af íviðio* 'from the troll-woman', threatens Freyja with fire (st. 48)⁴⁴ and implies that she must save herself by giving her lover poisoned ale to drink, sneering that:

'verða flestir fiqlausn þola' (*Hyndluljóð* 49,3–4)

'most people manage to put up with the price of saving their lives'.

She thus aims both to destroy Óttarr and to prove that Freyja's supposed love for him will not extend to sacrificing herself for him; but at the same time, she reveals herself as the true patroness of death in the poem.

The poem ends with Freyja negating Hyndla's curse and saying that Óttarr will derive only benefit from drinking the ale which will guarantee his ability to remember his ancestry and thus assert his *óðal* right (st. 50). But this is not a simple 'happy ending', for the reader or listener is left with two contradictory wishes for him, and we can certainly not feel sure that Hyndla's curse will prove ineffective. After all, she is associated with the dead, and as the prose editor of *Fáfnismál* puts it:

þat var trúa þeira í fornescio, at orð feigs mannz mætti mikít, ef hann þqlvaði óvin
sínom með nafni.

it was their belief in ancient times that a doomed person's word could do much, if
they cursed their enemy by name.⁴⁵

I think we should take it, as in every good folktale, that the words of both 'sisters' will come true: Óttarr will successfully assert his rights, but in due course Hyndla's curse will have its effect, and he will become actually Freyja's *ver ... í valsinni* (st. 7,3–4), 'lover on the road of the slain'. He is a 'sacred fool', at the mercy of powers he can influence but not control; and the only successful riposte he can make to death is to gain Freyja's favour, beget descendants while he is still alive, and hand on his lands and her favour to them. This is probably also what Hákon jarl is trying to do in the episode during his battle against the Jómsvíkingar; when, in desperation, he offers a human sacrifice to Þorgerðr Hólgabráúðr, he is prepared to sacrifice anyone except himself or his adult sons, who are, of course, the intended recipients of his *óðal* right and (he hopes) his relationship with Þorgerðr after his death.

III. Conclusions

The sources I have been looking at nearly all date from the post-Conversion period, and so must be approached cautiously, but they probably reflect survivals of two or more actual examples of local fertility goddesses in Norway in the late heathen period. Significant features have to be extricated from them with great caution, but some conclusions do seem possible.

1. There is little reliable evidence for single-purpose heathen temple buildings in the Norse world (with the doubtful and very late exception of the

one at Uppsala described by Adam of Bremen). There probably were specific shrines to Þorgerðr and Freyja, but we should probably visualise the *hørg* of *Hyndluljóð* st. 10 as an open-air altar and hearth (possibly with a covering over the idol, supported on corner-posts) rather than as a building. Þorgerðr is to be found in a forest clearing, and Hákon jarl goes to a forest clearing to pray to her even in *Flateyjarbók* ch. 154 and *Jómsvíkinga saga* ch. 32, where no building or idol is mentioned. As this feature is already in Tacitus' description of the Nerthus cult, it very probably represents reality. Some such clearings may have contained a secular hall belonging to the devotee of the goddess and also housing an idol of her, and this might explain the vivid image of the burning of Gullveig in Óðinn's hall in *Völuspá* st. 21; but if there was typically any structure in the clearing other than an open-air shrine, it is perhaps most likely to have been a funeral mound. This would explain the association of Þorgerðr's supposed father with a mound in Skúli Þorsteinsson's verse and in *Skáldskaparmál*, and perhaps also the fact that Hyndla is discovered in a cave.

2. The burning of the temple or idol of the goddess by the hero-protagonist is a repeated motif (see *Njáls saga*, *Harðar saga* and *Flateyjarbók* ch. 326), and it may be ironically paralleled in the burning at the end of *Hyndluljóð*. It makes an obvious appeal to Christian sensibilities, but it could still be a transformation of something in genuine heathen practice. The burning of Gullveig in *Völuspá* 21–22 (N-K 5–6) suggests that some sort of ritual cremation (whether of the dead landowner, the death aspect of the goddess, or both) may already have been part of the heathen cults.
3. Both Þorgerðr and Freyja have dark sisters, and these probably represent the death aspect of the goddess herself. Þorgerðr herself can bring death, and not only to Hákon jarl's enemies; Freyja shares the slain with Óðinn; and conversely, Hyndla may have sexual designs on Óttarr, just as Hel gains sexual pleasure from the royal descendants of Freyr in *Ynglingatal*.

This seems to reflect the common mythic realisation that nothing can be had for nothing; both Hákon jarl and Óttarr will have to pay for the special favours they receive. Perhaps these stories present male awareness that sexual fulfilment and the begetting of heirs are a prologue to one's own mortality. In the end, time will resolve this dilemma: the active protagonist *will* gain the satisfaction of begetting descendants, and *will* pay for it in the sexual satisfaction which he in turn provides for the death goddess. It will be worth it, for the only alternative is to refuse the embraces of Freyja, and that would bring death with no sexual or dynastic satisfaction; a man must accept his mortality and co-operate with the female principle in making the best of it.

APPENDIX I: SOURCES ON ÞORGERÐR HÖLGABRÚÐR

A. Pre-Christian

1. *Skúli Þorsteinsson, on the Battle of Svöld (1000), st. 4 (Skj. I B, 284; Kock I, 145):*

Þás ræfrvita Reifnis
rauðk fyr Svöldr til auðar,
herfylgins bark Hølga
haugþak saman baugum.

Reifnir – a sea-king, viking; *Reifnis ræfr* ‘viking’s roofing’ – ‘shield’, whose *viti* – ‘flame’ = ‘sword’;

Hølga haugþak – ‘the thatch of Hølgi’s mound’, obviously a kenning for gold or silver.

When I reddened the flame of Reifnir’s roofing (= sword) at Svöld for wealth, I gathered together the mound-thatch of warlike Hølgi (= treasure) in rings.

(Skúli is describing the plunder taken after the battle; it may not be coincidental that the gold-kenning in the following stanza is *Freyju tōr* ‘Freyja’s tears’).

2. (*doubtful*): *Tindr Hallkelsson, Hákonardrápa, on Hákon’s Battle with the Jómsvíkingar (994), st. 1 (Skj. I B, 136; Kock I, 75; ed. [with commentary] Bjarni Aðalbarnarson [1941], ÍF 26, 281–82):*

Varða, gims sem gerði
Gerðr bjúglimum herða
– gnýr óx Fjølfnis fúra –
farlig sæing jarli...

gims Gerðr – ‘Gerðr of the jewel’, ‘woman’; Chadwick (1950), 400–01 takes this to refer to Þorgerðr as Hákon’s mistress, but does not recognise the conventional woman-kenning; however, the kenning may have seemed particularly appropriate here because it could be applied to Þorgerðr;

Fjǫlnir – Óðinn, whose *fúra* ‘fires’ are swords.

It was not as if a beautiful jewel-Gerðr (=woman) made a bed for the jarl in her shoulder-branches (=arms) – a clash of *Fjǫlnir*’s fires (=swords) arose ...

B. Post-Conversion

1. (*doubtful*): *Saxo, Gesta Danorum, III, ii, 8 (ca. 1200) (ed. Friis-Jensen and trans. Zeeberg [2005], I, 194–95; trans. Fisher and Davidson [1979–80], I, 71 and Notes on II, 53–54):*

Helgo, *rex Halogiae*, woos Thora, daughter of Guso, *rex Finno-
rumque*; at first he is rejected because he sends an emissary rather than coming himself, but Hotherus eventually wins his bride for him by his eloquence.

(Saxo may preserve a tradition of *Hǫlgi* and *Þorgerðr* or *Þóra* here, but he does not suggest a cult relationship between them, though the Lappish origins of Thora, the giant-name of her father (see Simek [1993], 125) and the wooing of her through an emissary might all be drawn from traditions of the Vanir).

2. *Skáldskaparmál ch. 45 (ca. 1222; ed. Faulkes [1998], I, 60; trans. Faulkes [1987], 112):*

Hǫlgi was the father of *Þorgerðr* and *Hálogaland* is named after him. Both father and daughter were the recipients of heathen sacrifice, and *Hǫlgi*’s mound was made of alternate layers of gold and silver and of earth and stone, the former layers being a sacrificial offering; Snorri supports this by quoting *Skúli*’s verse (A. 1 above).

3. *Njáls saga ch. 88 (ca. 1290? ed. Einar Ól. Sveinsson [1954], ÍF 12, 214–15; trans. Cook [1997], CSI 3, 101–02):*

Víga-Hrappr enters the temple that belongs to *Hákon jarl* while the earl is away. He sees *Þorgerðr hǫldabrúðr* sitting there, wearing a *faldr* (bridal or married woman’s headdress) and a gold armring; he strips off the headdress and takes her ring, as well as those worn by the idols of *Þórr* and *Irpa*. Then he takes the idols outside, removes all their clothing, and sets fire to the temple. When the jarl returns, he says that the man who has done this will never get

to Valhøll; then he goes off by himself, falls on his knees and covers his eyes, and when he comes back to his men, is able to show them where Hrappr is hiding; however, Hrappr is so fleet of foot that he escapes.

4. *Harðar saga ch. 19 (surviving version ca. 1300? ed. Þórhallur Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson [1991], ÍF 13, 51–52; trans. Kellogg [1997], 214–15):*

Grímkell is a farmer at Ölfusvatn, southern Iceland (and is closely related to Hákon jarl); he has agreed to the marriage of his daughter Þorbjörg and goes to the temple of Þorgerðr hǫrgabúðr to pray for the success of the marriage, but finds the gods getting ready to leave. He asks where they intend to take their good luck; Þorgerðr says it will certainly not be to Grímkell's son Hǫrðr, who has plundered a gold ring belonging to her brother Sóti (a viking *draugr* whose grave-mound Hǫrðr has plundered, ch. 15). She would rather transfer her good luck to Þorbjörg, but there is such a great light over her that Þorgerðr fears it may separate them; Grímkell himself will not live long. Grímkell is very angry and burns the temple and all the gods, saying that they will not make any more predictions of disaster about him; but at dinner that evening he suddenly falls dead.

5. *Ketils saga hængs ch. 5 (ed. in FSN I, 261):*

Ketill is woken by a loud crash in the forest, goes out and encounters a troll-woman. He asks her where she is going (addressing her as *fóstra*); she angrily replies that she is going to an assembly of trolls, at which the major figures will be Skelkingr, king of the trolls, Ófóti from Ófótansfjörðr, and Þorgerðr Hǫrgatröll. She will have nothing to do with Ketill since he killed Kaldrani (a giant whom Ketill has killed in ch. 2), and she wades out into the sea. There is no lack of magic riders that night, but they do Ketill no harm. (In the preceding episode, based largely on verse, Ketill has confronted a giantess called *Forað* 'Danger' and thwarted her intention of marrying the [unnamed] jarl the next morning.)

6. *Flateyjarbók, Ólafs saga Tryggvasonar ch. 114 (MS. 1387–94; ed. Sigurður Nordal et al. [1944–45], I, 157; also regarded as ch. 23 of Færeyinga saga, ed. Ólafur Halldórsson [1967], 43–45):*

Hákon jarl's friend Sigmundr wants to go out to the Faroes to avenge his father. When Hákon asks him in whom he trusts, Sigmundr replies that it is in his own power and strength, but Hákon persuades him to seek the help of Þorgerðr Hǫrgabúðr. They go to a magnificent house in a forest clearing; its carvings

are inlaid with gold and silver, and it has many glass windows. It contains many deities, but chiefly a splendidly adorned female figure. The jarl prostrates himself in front of her, and they make an offering of silver to her; Hákon then says that if their gift has been accepted, he will be able to take the ring on her hand – but when he tries to do so, the idol clenches her fist to prevent Hákon from getting the ring. The jarl tearfully prostrates himself again, and this time Þorgerðr releases the ring, which Hákon gives to Sigmundur.

7a. *Þorkell Gíslason, Búadrápa (ca. 1200?), on the battle with the Jómsvíkingar, stt. 9–10 (Skj. I B, 537–38; Kock, I, 261):*

In describing the battle, Þorkell refers to the hailstones, each of which weighed an ounce (*Hagl vá hvert eyri*, st. 9,1), and continues (st. 10):

Qrum réð sér snörpum
(slikt vas raun görpum)
flagð et forljóta
af fingrum skjóta;
gerðisk grímt fíkjum
at gumnum ríkjum
(gnýr vas, hör hlífa)
hregg ok loptdrífa.

She resorted to sharp arrows
(such a thing was a trial to warriors),
the extremely ugly hag,
shooting them from her fingers;
it became extremely harsh
against the powerful men
(there was a loud clash of shields),
the storm and driving snow.

The ‘hag’ here might be either Þorgerðr or Irpa, though her extreme ugliness may suggest Irpa. Neither of these stanzas is quoted in *Flateyjarbók* or *Jómsvíkinga saga* (see 7c below), but all their details are included in one account or both.

7b. *Bishop Bjarni Kolbeinsson (d. 1222), Jómsvíkingadrápa, stt. 30, 32 (Skj. II B, 7; Kock, II, 4–5):*

Hvervetna frák hǫlða,
herr æxti gný darra
fyr hreggviðum hjörva
hrökkva gunnar rǫkkum,
áðr í örva drífu
ýtum grimmr at blóta,
framm kom heipt en harða,
Hǫkun syni tæki. (St. 30)

On every side I heard that noblemen
(the army raised a clash of spears)
before the storm-trees of blades
(=warriors)
fell back, from those upright in war,
until in the blizzard of arrows
the one fierce to men, for sacrifice
(the harsh enmity proceeded),
Hákon, seized his son.

Þá frákk él et illa
 œða Hǫlgabrúði,
 glumði hagl á hlífum
 harða grímt ór norðri,
 þars í ormræn augu
 ýtum skýja grjóti
 (því knátti ben blása)
 barði hreggi keyrðu. (St. 32)

Then I heard of the evil hailstorm
 stirred up by Hǫlgi's bride:
 hail clanged on shields,
 extremely fiercely from the north,
 when into the snake-glittering eyes
 of men, stones from the clouds
 (wounds caused by that made a
 wheezing noise)
 were thrown, driven by the storm.

Neither of these stanzas is quoted in *Flateyjarbók* or *Jómsvíkinga saga* (see 7c below), but the content of both is included in their accounts.

7c. *Flateyjarbók*, Ólafs saga Tryggvasonar ch. 154–55; *Jómsvíkinga saga* chs. 32–34 (*Flateyjarbók*, ed. Sigurður Nordal et al. [1944–45], I, 210–11; *Jómsvíkinga saga*, ed. Blake [1962], 36–38):

Hákon jarl is being attacked by the Jómsvíkingar. During a lull in the battle, which is going badly for him, he lands on a wooded island and goes to a clearing, where he lies down facing north and prays to Þorgerðr Hǫrðabrúðr (*Hǫlgabrúðr* in *Jómsvíkinga saga*) to help him. She will not listen, and refuses various sacrifices until he offers the life of anyone except himself and his adult sons Eiríkr and Sveinn. She accepts this, demanding the life of his seven-year-old son Erlingr; the jarl has the boy killed. The battle resumes and Hákon attacks. A blizzard of hail comes suddenly from the north, driving into the faces of the Jómsvíkingar; Þorgerðr appears in the jarl's army as a *flagð* ('ogress') shooting arrows from each finger and killing a man every time she fires them. When the storm abates, Hákon renews his prayers, and it resumes in full strength; Þorgerðr's sister Irpa is now seen in the battle alongside her. At last his enemy Sigvaldi flees, reasoning that his vow was to fight against men in Norway, not against troll-women. (*Jómsvíkinga saga* adds that after the battle, Hákon's men weighed some of the hailstones (*haglkornin*) to determine the greatness of Þorgerðr and Irpa, and one of them weighed an ounce).

8. *Flateyjarbók*, Ólafs saga Tryggvasonar ch. 173 (ed. Sigurður Nordal et al. [1944–45], I, 235; also regarded as Þorleifs þátrr jarlsskálds, ch. 7, ed. [from *Flateyjarbók*] Jónas Kristjánsson [1956], ÍF 9, 225–27):

Þorleifr Ásgeirsson jarlsskáld has recited an insulting and magically damaging poem in Hákon's jarl's hall. Hákon consults Þorgerðr Hǫrðabrúðr and her

sister Irpa, and then makes a wooden man out of driftwood; he kills a man and puts his heart into the wooden figure, clothes it and gives it the name Þorgarðr (possibly a male version of Þorgerðr?). He and the sisters bring Þorgarðr to life by magic, equip him with a halberd from the temple which previously belonged to Hǫrgi, and send him off to Iceland to kill Þorleifr. Mortally wounded, Þorleifr strikes at Þorgarðr with his sword, and the magically created man sinks head-first into the earth.

9. Flateyjarbók, Ólafs saga Tryggvasonar *ch.* 326 (*ed. Sigurður Nordal et al. [1944–45], I, 452–54*):

After the death of Hákon jarl, king Ólafr Tryggvason finds Þorgerðr Hǫrðabrúðr in her magnificent house in a clearing in the forest, removes her gold, silver and fine clothing, and drags the idol behind his horse until he gets back to his men. He then asks whether any of them wants to buy a wife (or ‘a woman’). One of his men addresses the idol, asking why she is here, wretchedly deprived of the fine array which she was given by Hákon jarl when he loved her. The king asks whether he has any love for this woman himself, and the man prudently replies that he was speaking to the idol in scorn. The king then has Þorgerðr re-dressed and placed in a high seat, with her gold chests beside her, full of the gold and silver which she was given by Hákon jarl. He then makes all his men look at her, and is pleased that none of them offers her reverence or respect, but all look sadly at her. Then he has the idol stripped again and hits it with his club until it is in pieces, after which it is burnt, along with an image of Freyr which he has previously removed from another temple.

C. Forms of the Names

Figure 11.1

Skúli Þorsteinsson	(Hǫlgi)	
Tindr Hallkelsson	(?Gerðr)	
Snorri, <i>Skáldskaparmál</i>	Þorgerðr Hǫlgabrúðr	
Bjarni, <i>Jónsvíkingadrápa</i>	Hǫlga brúðr	
<i>Njáls saga</i>	Þorgerðr hǫldabrúðr	(+ Irpa)
<i>Harðar saga</i>	Þorgerðr hǫrgabrúðr	
<i>Ketils saga hængs</i>	Þorgerðr Hǫrgatröll	
<i>Flateyjarbók</i> (all episodes)	Þorgerðr Hǫrðabrúðr	(+ Irpa)
<i>Jónsvíkinga saga</i>	Þorgerðr Hǫlgabrúðr	(+ Irpa)
Saxo	(?Thora, Helgo)	

APPENDIX II: THE STRUCTURE OF *HYNDLULJÓÐ*

A. Opening Frame:

- st. 1: An unidentified speaker wakes Hyndla (whom she calls her friend and sister, and who lives in a cave); the two of them, she says, must ride together to Valhøll.
- 2–3: There they will ask for the favour of Óðinn, who gives gold, weapons, victory, eloquence, intelligence, a fair wind, poetic ability and manly courage.
- 4: The speaker, who refers to herself in the third person, will make sacrifice to Þórr, asking him always to show favour to Hyndla, though he is unused to giant's brides.
- 5: She urges Hyndla to take one of her wolves from its stall and let it run with her boar; Hyndla retorts that the boar is slow at treading the 'way of the gods', and that she will not load up her 'excellent steed'.
- 6: Hyndla names her antagonist as Freyja, calls her deceitful, and says that she has her *verr í valsinni* (apparently 'lover on the way of the slain', i.e. the way to Valhøll), and that he is young Óttarr, son of Innsteinn.
- 7: Freyja says Hyndla is mistaken – this is the golden-bristled boar Hildisvíni ('Battle-Swine'), made for her by two skilful dwarves, Dáinn and Nabbi.
- 8: She proposes that they dismount and discuss the descent of those men who are derived from gods.
- 9: She explains that young Óttarr and Angantýr have wagered gold (apparently in a legal dispute), and that Óttarr needs help so that he may enjoy his inheritance.
- 10: She adds that Óttarr has made and adorned a shrine for her and made sacrifice; he always trusted in goddesses.
- 11: She urges Hyndla to relate the great families among human beings (still without acknowledging that Óttarr is actually present).

B. Óttarr's Ancestry

- 12–28: Hyndla addresses Óttarr, first telling him the five generations of his immediate male ancestors that he needs to assert his *óðal* right (st. 12), and then relating them to a list of great families, including the royal families of Denmark and Sweden, the Burgundians and the Goths, and a variety of famous legendary figures; the sporadically repeated refrain of this section of the

poem is: ‘*alt er þat ætt þín, Óttarr heimsí*’, ‘All that is your kindred, Óttarr the foolish.’

C. The ‘Shorter *Völuspá*’

[stt. 29–44 – possibly of separate origin; on the parentage of the gods, giants and other beings, the future collapse of the world, and the coming of another figure, which seems to resemble the Second Coming of Christ]

D. Closing Frame

- st. 45: Freyja demands that Hyndla should bring the ale of memory (*minnisöl*) to her boar, so that he may remember and assemble all this information on the third morning, when he and Angantýr reckon up their ancestry.
- 46–47: Hyndla tells her to go away – she wants to sleep – and says that her ‘noble friend’ leaps about outside at night like Heiðrún with the billy-goats, that she ran after Óðr, and that ‘many have pushed themselves under the front of your skirt’ (st. 47,3–4).
- 48–49: Hyndla threatens Freyja with fire to prevent her from leaving, but adds ‘most people can endure the price of saving their own lives’, implying that Freyja can save herself if she will take the ale and give it to Óttarr, mingled with poison and with bad luck.
- 50: Freyja retorts that the curse of the *brúðr iǵtuns* will have no effect; Óttarr is to drink the precious drink and she wishes him all that is good.

NOTES

- 1 Motz (1993b), 75–84, especially 76–78.
- 2 See Olaf Olsen (1965), especially 116–235.
- 3 See Chadwick (1950), 411–12, 400 respectively.
- 4 ed. Blake (1962), 37.
- 5 cf. *Gauti* ‘the Geat’, one of the bynames of Óðinn, e.g. in *Grímnismál* 54, N-K 68. Blake (ed., 1962), 51 takes the presence of Þórr alongside Þorgerðr and Irpa in the temple described in *Njáls saga* as a replacement of an earlier cult of Hølg, but this is only a guess.
- 6 cf. *Ynglingr*, used as a title for Haraldr hárfagri in Þorbjörn hornklofi’s *Haraldskvæði* 4,7; *Skj.* I B, 22; Kock I, 14.
- 7 Jónas Kristjánsson (ed. [1956], *Inngangur LXIV*) points out that this *þátrr* has many features in common with *Eindriða þátrr ilbreiðs* (see *Flateyjarbók*, ed. Sigurður Nordal et al. [1944–45], I, 507–16), but neither the men under the hall nor the daughter appears in that story; indeed, many of the differences between

the two *þættir* could be explained by the suggestion that *Þorvalds þáttur tasalda* may have adopted some supernatural elements from tales derived from traditions like that of Þorgerðr.

- 8 On the forms of the name and the relationship between them, see Storm (1885), and *Jómsvíkinga saga*, ed. Blake (1962), 51–52.
- 9 Chadwick (1950), 400–01 assumes that the reference to Gerðr in Tindr Hallkelsson's *Hákonardrápa* 1,2 (*Skj.* I B, 136; Kock I, 75) also alludes to Þorgerðr, but this must remain uncertain.
- 10 In Þórðr Særeksson, *lausavísa* 3,6; *Skj.* I B, 304; Kock I, 154.
- 11 In *Grímnismál* 11,5, N-K 59.
- 12 Further see Chadwick (1950), 405.
- 13 See *Qgmundar þáttur dytts*, ed. Jónas Kristjánsson (1956), ÍF 9, 112; ed. Wyatt and Cook (1993), 6.
- 14 *Skj.* I B, 8, 12–13; Kock I, 5, 8; with commentary in *Ynglinga saga*, ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson (1941), ÍF 26, 33–34, 76–79.
- 15 On *guldgubber* in general and Sorte Muld in particular, see Watt (1999); they seem to date from a period between the late sixth and late ninth centuries. These tiny objects are extremely difficult to find, and Watt (2002) makes it seem probable that the huge number of them found at Sorte Muld reflects the unusually meticulous excavation methods used there, notably the water-sieving of large amounts of spoil. In this case, it seems probable that the much smaller numbers of them found elsewhere may represent only a small proportion of those that were actually present on the sites concerned.
- 16 See also Ratke and Simek (2006), especially 262–63, where *guldgubber* of the 'wraith' type (apparently naked single figures with rudimentary features, enlarged eyes and large hands with the palms facing forward) are interpreted as figures of the dead. They usually have no attribute objects, but occasionally wear a necklace (as the clothed male *gubbe* also often does); it seems very likely that they may be representations of the ruler's dead forebears.
- 17 cf. Egill's silent acceptance of a ring from King Æthelstan in *Egils saga* ch. 55, which has this implication (ed. Sigurður Nordal [1933], ÍF 2, 144).
- 18 The same might be argued of Gefjón, who is said in *Lokasenna* 20 (N-K 100) to have prostituted herself in exchange for a jewel, and in *Gylfaginning* ch. 1 to have done so in return for some land (which became the Danish island of Sjælland – ed. Faulkes [1982], 7; trans. Faulkes [1987], 7); she is probably to be identified with Freyja under her by-name Gefn (for which see e.g. Einarr Skúlason, *Øxarflokkur* 5,7; *Skj.* I B, 450; Kock I, 221) – see Turville-Petre (1964), 178, 187–88.
- 19 According to Chadwick (1950), 397, Ketill's family home of Hrafnista is on Njarðey ('Njorðr's island', modern Nærøy, North Trøndelag), although the version of the saga published in *FSN* places him much further south, off Romsdal

- (*FSN* I, 245 etc.). As two of the three branches of the manuscript tradition have the location on Nærøy, where there is a modern farm called Ramsta(d) (=Hrafnista), Chadwick's version is probably correct, but in either case the location is on an island out in the sea.
- 20 Tacitus, *Germania* ch. 40; trans. Rives (1999), 93 and note on 292–94.
- 21 This is preserved as the second half of *Qgmundar þáttur dytts* (see ed. Jónas Kristjánsson [1956], ÍF 9, 113; ed. Wyatt and Cook [1993], 7–8 and intro. p. xx).
- 22 Watt (1999), 141 (and illustrations on p. 139) points out that the *guldgubber* from Sorte Muld include a few figures of boars, horses or stags (?) and birds (?); but the majority of the animal figures there are certainly or probably boars.
- 23 It cannot be assumed, either, that she was explicitly worshipped as a giantess (a type of cult for which there is little warrant elsewhere), as is done by Motz (1993b), 76–78.
- 24 The name seems to be related to *jarpr* 'swarthy', Old English *eorþ* (which is used of dark-skinned peoples, e.g. the Egyptians in *Exodus* 194, ed. Lucas [1977], 105 and note), and the personal name *Erpr* applied to sons of foreign fathers, e.g. in *Atlakviða* 38 and *Hamðismál* 14, 28 (see Dronke I, 11, 164, 167 and note on p. 71); see also Simek (1993), 327.
- 25 *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* chs. 191–92, *Flateyjarbók* (ed. Sigurður Nordal et al., [1944–45], I, 260–64); cf. Snorri Sturluson, *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* chs. 48–49 (ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson [1941], ÍF 26, 293–98). For a useful summary of the sources on Hákon's death, see Hamer (1992); he analyses it in Christian allegorical terms, as symbolic of the jarl's unrepented lechery and apostasy from Christianity, and this is undoubtedly part of its meaning; but Hákon's lecherous behaviour may itself have been a duty associated with his devotion to a heathen goddess of sexuality, and the boar and the sow were symbols of that sexuality within heathenism itself (see below). See also Chadwick (1950), 409–11.
- 26 Chadwick (1950), 398 also links Þorgerðr to another Thora, the daughter of King Gusi of the Lapps, who marries Helgo, King of Halogia (i.e. Hálógaland) in Saxo, *Gesta Danorum* III, 8 (ed. Friis-Jensen and trans. Zeeberg [2005], I, 194–95; trans. Fisher and Davidson [1979–80], I, 71 and notes on II, 53–54); it does seem probable that Saxo is referring to Hólgi and Þorgerðr or Þóra (as king and bride rather than father and daughter), but he preserves no memory of a cult relationship between them, except that the Lappish origins of Thora and the giant-name of her father (possibly 'storm', from *gustr*, see Simek [1993], 125) may link her to traditions of the Winter Princess, a story-type of which there are several examples in the early chapters of *Ynglinga saga* (see McKinnell [2005], 69–80).
- 27 Most critics have taken the latter view, but Steinsland (1991), 242–59 and Quinn (2002), 262–64 both make a good case for considering it as a single entity.

- 28 Orchard (2011), 339 proposes a solution to this problem, suggesting that the poem may be a satire about Óttarr birtingr, a humbly-born Norwegian royal advisor who rose to prominence in the 1130's, married Queen Ingiríðr Rognvaldsdóttir, the widow of King Haraldr gilli, but was murdered in 1146 (see e.g. *Morkinskinna* ch. 81 for his ennoblement, ch. 102 for his marriage and death; ed. Ármann Jakobsson and Þórður Ingi Guðjónsson [2011], ÍF 24:2, 140, 212). This theory would explain the element of mockery in the poem; if it is right, Freyja represents Queen Ingiríðr and the poem must date from some time after her marriage to Óttarr but not long after his (possibly predictable) murder, but Hyndla cannot be identified with any historical person.
- 29 Or perhaps *Gullinbursti* 'Gold-bristle' may be another proper name here.
- 30 *LP* 557 gives five examples of the name *Sýr*: as a *heiti* for Freyja in *pula* IV h 3,5 (*Skj.* I B, 661; Kock I, 326); twice in kennings for gold or jewels, *Sýrar mey* ('S.'s daughter') in Hallfreðr vandræðaskáld, *lausavísa* 5,4 (not in the texts in *Skj.* I B, 158 and Kock I, 85, but cf. *Skj.* I A, 167 (footnote) and *Hallfreðar saga* ch. 6, ed. Einar Ólafur Sveinsson [1939], ÍF 8, 156), and *Sýrar grátr* ('S.'s weeping') in *Grettis saga*, *lausavísa* 53,2 (so in *LP*, and *Skj.* II B, 476, but Kock II, 260 and ed. Guðni Jónsson [1936], ÍF 7, 266 read *Sýrar gráps*, 'hail of Sýr', with the same sense); once in the valkyrie-kennung *sárlaxa Sýr* ('S. of the salmon of wounds', i.e. of swords, in Egill Skallagrímsson, *lausavísa* 18,5; *Skj.* I B, 46; Kock I, 30); and once in the giantess-kennung *fentanna Sýr* ('Sýr of sea-teeth', i.e. of cliffs or rocks), in Kormákr Ögmundarson, *Sigurðardrápa* 1,1–2 (*Skj.* I B 69; Kock I, 42).
- 31 *Gylfaginning* ch. 49 (ed. Faulkes [1982], 47; trans. Faulkes [1987], 50); *Skáldskaparmál* ch. 7 (ed. Faulkes [1998], I, 18; trans. Faulkes [1987], 75).
- 32 As in the myth of Þórr and Geirröðr, for which see *Skáldskaparmál* ch. 18 and *Þórsdrápa*, which Snorri quotes in full after his prose version of the story (ed. Faulkes [1998], I, 24–30; trans. Faulkes [1987], 81–86); and cf. also the giant's sister in *Þrymskviða* 32 (N-K 115).
- 33 I have removed the editorial comma in the middle of the line.
- 34 Could there even be an added punning reference to Hákon jarl and his shrine in the form *hlaðinn*, with the suggestion 'He caused my shrine to be jewelled like the one at Hlaðir'?
- 35 The commentators have had problems here. *LP* 188 explains: 'by being coloured red with blood the stones have become shining red in appearance, like glass beakers'; others have suggested that Óttarr made such frequent sacrifices that the stones became glazed by the sacrificial fires (SG III.i, 373; Lafarge and Tucker [1992], 87; Larrington [1996], 296; Orchard [2011], 340). In realistic terms, neither explanation seems satisfactory: it is hard to see how the reddening of stones with blood could make them resemble glass; nor would the frequency of Óttarr's

sacrificial fires vitrify the stones of the shrine (since what would be required for that would be an extremely high temperature on one occasion).

- 36 It is applied to the precious crystal cup of *Hymiskviða* 29,4 (N-K 93); the pairing *á gleri oc á gulli* 'on glass and on gold' in *Sigrdrífumál* 17,1 (N-K 193); the wonder of *gagnsætt gler* 'transparent glass' set alongside a gold-hoarding dragon and the bright sun in the sky in *Málsháttakvæði* 27,1–3 (*Skj.* II B, 144; Kock II, 77); and the birth of Christ from a pure maiden compared to the sun shining through clear glass in Eysteinn Ásgrímsson's *Lilja* 33,3 and 5 (*Skj.* II B, 399; Kock II, 217; *SPSMA* 7:2, 601).
- 37 ed. Faulkes (1982), 33; trans. Faulkes (1987), 33.
- 38 ed. Faulkes (1982), 29; trans. Faulkes (1987), 29–30.
- 39 *LP* 442, sense 1; the earliest poetic phrase linking Óðr and Freyja is the reference to her as *Óðs mey* in *Völuspá* 25,8 (N-K 6).
- 40 See Apuleius, *Metamorphoses* IV–VI, ed. and trans. Hanson (1989), I, 236–355.
- 41 Cf. the *minnisveig* which Sigrdrífa gives to Sigurðr before imparting her wisdom to him in *Sigrdrífumál*, prose after st. 2 (N-K 189); and the *minnisveig* of *Göngu-Hrólfs saga* ch. 25, (*FSN* II, 417–18), which is given to Ingibjörg to restore her lost memory as part of the release from a spell which has also turned her skin black and made her fall in love with a giant enchanter.
- 42 CV 429.
- 43 N-K 279, 55.
- 44 N-K 296 follows other editors in emending to *of íviðio* 'against the troll-woman', thus making Freyja into the attacker, but although the first version of this paper accepted this emendation, it is difficult to see any necessity for it.
- 45 *Fáfnismál*, prose after st. 1 (N-K 180).

12 The Trouble with Father:

Hervararkviða and the Adaptation of Traditional Story-patterns

I. Defining the Problem

Encounters between a representative of humanity and some being from another world are extremely common in Old Norse mythology. It is easy to make this statement because of a firm dualism of outlook which usually allows us to recognise clearly which types of being belong in which category. Gods and human beings belong to This World; the gods were its creators, and the creators of the first man and woman.¹ Selected human warriors are in turn chosen by Óðinn to help the gods in their last great battle against the giants; and when the gods fall at Ragnarøk, human beings will also depart from this life.² But the gods are also in a sense idealised human beings. Like human beings, they are mortal and subject to Fate.³ They were routinely claimed as ancestors by Germanic royal families, and sometimes had sexual relationships with human beings.⁴ In short, men and gods are equivalent (if different in power and status) as representatives of This World.

Ranged against them are a variety of monsters, giants and trolls, dwarfs, the dead (sometimes), and *völur* ('prophetesses'); and just as gods and men are linked, there is a similar tendency to equate different representatives of the Other World. Giant hags can give birth to monsters;⁵ either giants or dwarfs may appear as hideous representatives of cold or darkness who demand goddesses as brides;⁶ and dwarfs, who live in the earth and rocks, sometimes have names which suggest that they represent the dead.⁷ In quasi-realistic literature, *völur* 'prophetesses' usually appear as itinerant fortune-tellers or enchanters,⁸ but in mythological poetry they are almost always linked to giants and/or the dead;⁹ one, in *Helreið Brynhildar*, even speaks like a dwarf, out of a stone.¹⁰ The representatives of the Other World are therefore usually just as easy to recognise as those of This World. Of course there are a few exceptions, notably

Loki, who often acts as a mediator between gods and giants without being clearly attached to either group; but his very ambiguity serves to remind us that there are two opposed camps, neither of which can rely on him.

II. Types of Encounter

Conventional male-female encounters with the Other World fall into a number of clear narrative patterns:

a) Types associated mainly with the Vanir:

1. Marriage between one of the male Vanir (or a king descended from them) and a giantess (or the daughter of a 'winter' king from the frozen north or east). Their union is usually unsuccessful, the couple often part, and the marriage may lead to the death of the god or king. These stories often suggest that a marriage between civilised fertility and wild nature or barrenness is essential, but simultaneously either disastrous or impossible.¹¹
2. A sexual relationship between one of the female Vanir and a human ruler or landowner, in which the goddess may help her human lover to gain support or information from a giantess or hag.¹²
3. Confrontation between a human man and a possibly Other-World prophetess. Sometimes the human being is an unjust king descended from the Vanir and the prophetess's predictions (which always come true) include the destruction of the protagonist. This seems to have given rise to two variations: one concerning a confrontation between the prophetess and a young hero who is forced to receive a prophecy which he does not want to hear; and another, exemplified by *Völuspá* and *Baldur's draumar*, in which the patriarch is replaced by Óðinn.¹³

b) Types associated mainly with the Æsir:

4. A fight in which Þórr or a human hero derived from him destroys at least one giantess (and usually also at least one giant). The Þórr-figure usually has to endure some humiliation, but he always emerges victorious. Stories like that of the confrontation between Beowulf and Grendel's mother belong to a related type, sometimes called 'the Bear's Son'.¹⁴
5. Patronage of Þórr, or of an unusually strong human hero, by a giantess who appears to act as a surrogate mother.¹⁵
6. Seduction of a giantess by Óðinn, usually for an ulterior motive.¹⁶
7. Seduction of a human protégé of Óðinn by a giantess. This usually includes the accidental begetting of a son, who may later have an uneasy or tragic relationship with his father.¹⁷

- c) Encounters with the dead, associated mainly with human beings:
 - 8. Encounters in which a living man calls up a dead relative, usually female, to teach him a sacred number of protective magic spells.¹⁸
 - 9. Encounters in which a dead hero returns to spend one night with his wife or beloved, either in his funeral mound or in her bower; the oldest example of this pattern is in *Helgakviða Hundingsbana II* (N-K 150–61), and it may not have existed before the twelfth century.¹⁹

III. Defining the Conventions

3.1 *Distinction of Genre*

The different types of cross-sexual encounter with the Other World are usually quite distinct, and most of them are linked only to one god or family of gods. Marriages with giantesses or winter-princesses are undertaken only by the Vanir or their royal descendants; it is only the Vanir goddesses who have sexual relationships with human men; battles with giantesses are associated only with Þórr, or with obviously Þórr-derived heroes; helpful motherly giantesses usually assist Þórr; seductions of or by giantesses are usually particular to Óðinn and his protégés. There are a few exceptions: many confrontations with prophetesses are associated with kings descended from the Vanir, but two (in *Völuspá* and *Baldur's draumar*) are attributed to Óðinn, and others, like the one in *Qrvar-Odds saga*, are associated with Odinic heroes. The stories of calling up the dead, or of the return of a dead hero to spend one night with his beloved, are typically attributed to human beings rather than gods, but may have had Odinic associations. They are never attributed to the Vanir or Þórr, or to human beings associated with them.

3.2 *The Male Hero*

All these patterns except that of the dead lover's return have it in common that the representative of This World is nearly always male; the story told in *Hervararkviða* which I shall consider in the main body of this paper is almost the only exception. There is a notable absence of heroic females confronting the force of demons, such as are found in many Christian legends that were popular in northern Europe shortly after the conversion – stories like those of Juliana (who beats up the devil who tempts her in prison)²⁰ or Margaret of Antioch (who is devoured by a dragon, which then bursts and lets her out unharmed).²¹

This absence of female representatives of This World is probably due to the fact that it was regarded as normal for women to be subordinate in sexual relationships. It was not tolerable for a giant or dwarf to control a goddess or heroic woman, and so myths in which the apparent representative of This World is female are usually either abductions or unacceptable demands of marriage. Giants are associated with cold and sterility, and it is a hideous fate for any woman to be condemned to marriage with one of them: Skírnir threatens Gerðr (herself a giantess) that if she continues to resist the advances of Freyr, she will either have no husband at all or be married to a three-headed frost giant below the gate of the world of the dead.²²

Myths of abduction or unacceptable proposal belong to a type in which the giants deprive or threaten to deprive the gods of something vital to the survival of the world, and the gods must respond with a mixture of trickery and strength (and often with an element of treachery).²³ It is the gods' response to this challenge which then forms the heart of the story, and in this the female object of the abduction or proposal is not involved; she becomes merely a valuable object which the gods need to protect from the giants, like Sif's hair or Þórr's hammer.

3.3 *Moral Complexity*

The other common feature of all these patterns is that they are usually morally ambiguous in some way. The surviving sources on the marriages of the Vanir are openly critical. Among the most obvious features of *Skírnismál* are Freyr's self-indulgent passion and the fact that Gerðr allows herself to be bullied by Skírnir into a match with her brother's killer (or perhaps prefers her own sexual fulfilment to her obligation to her family). The other sources which mention Freyr's loss of his sword see it as an example of the shameful folly of sexual passion (see especially *Lokasenna* 42, N-K 104–05). In Snorri's version, the myth of Njǫrðr and Skaði is an absurd burlesque, in which everything is the reverse of what it should be.²⁴ Similarly, some of the kings descended from the Vanir behave unjustly: Vanlandi and Vísburr abandon their wives, Vísburr denies his wife her marriage gift, and Agni kills his wife's father.²⁵ All these actions are from a mythic point of view unavoidable: the king who represents fertility cannot stay in the land of winter or live in amity with its king, nor can he afford to give away the necklace that represents his sacral function. Nonetheless, they are unjust when measured by human standards.

The stories of goddesses and their human lovers also include sinister or disreputable elements. In *Hyndluljóð*, Óttarr is repeatedly called *inn heimski* 'the foolish', and he allows himself to be transformed into a boar and ridden by Freyja, who is portrayed as deceitful and promiscuous. Many of the stories

about the relationship between Hákon jarl and his goddess Þorgerðr Hølgabrúðr involve sinister magical acts, including the sacrifice of Hákon's own son to the goddess (see essay 11 above). But again, these disreputable acts often seem 'necessary': Óttarr needs Freyja's help in order to assert his *óðal* right, and Hákon faces the immediate prospect of death in battle if he cannot enlist the help of his goddess.

Similarly, encounters with prophetesses are often tinged with injustice on the part of the human protagonist, as in the confrontations in which Vanlandi and Vísburr become the victims of Hulð, or the scene in *Hrólfs saga kraka* ch. 3 in which King Fróði forces the prophetess to speak as part of his attempt to find and destroy his two nephews (*FSN* II, 9–10). Óðinn's contests with prophetesses are also morally questionable. So long as we see him as looking fearlessly into a future which includes his own certain death, he is to be unreservedly admired. But by the standards of ordinary human behaviour, the *seiðr* (magic) employed by the *völur* was regarded as unequivocally evil, and its practice by males was morally equivalent to *ergi*, passive homosexuality, which was regarded with general revulsion.²⁶ Óðinn could not call up dead *völur* and gain power over them without practising magic, and according to *Lokasenna* 24 (N-K 101) he had even been guilty of becoming a *völva* himself. Furthermore, the prophecy he receives in *Völuspá* reveals that the gods have brought their destruction on themselves by allowing themselves to become corrupt.

Þórr's fights against giantesses are all embarrassing or compromising, carrying either a risk of some sexual humiliation or a sense that it is not proper to fight women (a criticism explicitly made by Óðinn in *Hárbarðsljóð* 38, N-K 84). In a mythic sense, Þórr's exploits are thoroughly justified, for female monsters are often more dangerous than male ones. But as soon as the focus is changed and it is suggested that gods and giantesses are really only men and women after all, the ordinary prejudices of everyday life come into play to condemn the fighter against women as a coward. But again, the well-being of the gods often depends on Þórr behaving as he does: as Loki reminds him in *Þrymskviða*:

‘þegar muno iǫtnar ásgarð búa
nema þú þinn hamar þér um heimtir’
(*Þrymskviða* 18,5–8)

‘the giants will be living in Ásgarðr
pretty soon
unless you fetch your hammer back’.

Óðinn's seductions may also be seen as either admirable or disreputable. We need not share the crude envy for his exploits shown by Þórr in *Hárbarðsljóð*; but it must have been possible for some people to admire his purposeful begetting of sons before Eyvindr could use this motif in *Háleygjatal* to extol the

ancestry of the jarls of Hlaðir.²⁷ Similarly, some may have admired Óðinn's outwitting of Gunnlōð. On the other hand, Saxo finds Othinus's wooing and rape of Rinda both ludicrous and disgraceful,²⁸ and the magic employed in this seduction was also disreputable. The surviving version of the story of Billings's maid also makes Óðinn look ridiculous.²⁹ These seductions may also have seemed disgraceful because they involved an element of self-prostitution by Óðinn: this is certainly implied by Loki's crude parody in *Lokasenna* 20,6 (N-K 100) of Óðinn's description of his union with Gunnlōð (*Hávamál* 108,6, see N-K 33), when he implicitly compares Óðinn's behaviour in sleeping with Gunnlōð in return for the mead of poetry to Gefion's prostitution of herself in return for a jewel.

The Odinic heroes and their giant-begotten sons are also viewed equivocally. Búi refuses to recognise his son and is accidentally killed by him because of his own obstinacy.³⁰ Qrvar-Oddr's half-giant son Vígnir despises his father, disregards his advice and brings about his own death as a result.³¹ The dead Bárðr is enraged by his son's conversion to Christianity, appears to him in a dream and inflicts on him the significantly Odinic punishment of blindness.³²

There seem also to have been mixed feelings about family relationships with giantesses; otherwise it is hard to explain why the helpful giantesses in *Þórdrápa* and *Hymiskviða* are so clearly proxy mothers but cannot apparently be allowed actually to be Þórr's mother. If the world of the giants is seen as the realm of death, there may have been a sense that calling on the dead for help and comfort is wrong, however understandable. In the helpful giantess stories, this remains merely implicit, and it is equally possible to explain the denial of the giant mother as due to a feeling that women are more akin to wild nature than men and less to human intellect, and that it is demeaning to the hero to be dependent on female help. But in stories where the hero calls up a dead relative (perhaps archetypically his mother) for help, the association with the dead is explicit, unavoidable and morally suspect. This may be why Gróa asks what disaster has befallen Svipdagr to justify the fact:

‘es þú þá móþor kallar, es til moldar
es komen
ok ór ljópheimom lipen?’

‘that you call for that mother who has
come to the earth
and passed out of the worlds of men?’

(*Grógaldr* 2,4–6)³³

Similarly, in *Helgakviða Hundingsbana II* 43 (N-K 159), Sigrún's eagerness to embrace the dead Helgi is compared to the eagerness of ravens to devour corpses, and it is an almost literally exact comparison. We can sympathise with the widow's acute grief and sense of loss, but the physicality of her desire for

a corpse reminds us that relationships between the living and the dead are a breach of nature.

The sense of moral ambiguity that typically accompanies all these patterns of story may suggest that part of their inherited function was the investigation of a moral problem or contradiction, perhaps with the aim either of resolving the contradiction or of reconciling oneself to its consequences. The rest of this paper will attempt to show how one poet uses and adapts one of these story-types, that of the protagonist who raises up a dead relative, and how this permits an investigation of problematic gender- and inter-generational relationships.

IV. *Hervararkviða*

In the light of this analysis of distinct types of story, we can be fairly confident that when a poem departs from the typical patterns, its poet and initial audience were likely to be aware of the fact. Audiences were clearly expected to exercise their own moral judgement, so deviations from the typical are likely to be deliberate challenges to the listener to consider the problems in a new way.

One example of such deviation from the usual forms is to be found in *Hervararkviða*, a poem now consisting of 31 stanzas of dialogue in the version represented by its most important manuscript (R), which is the second of four poems which have been combined by a prose author to form the overall tragic narrative of *Heiðreks saga*; *Hervararkviða* (sometimes known as ‘The Waking of Angantýr’) is in ch. 4 of the saga.³⁴ Mundt has argued convincingly that the first version of the saga may have been compiled for Queen Ingigerðr of Sweden between 1118 and 1125.³⁵ *Hervararkviða* must be older than the saga and by a different author, since the poem and its surrounding prose do not always agree: for example, in stanza 5,5–6³⁶ Hervör says that her dreams will turn out to be completely true, but the prose has said nothing about any dreams. The insistent association of the ancient (i.e. heathen) dead with engulfing fire may suggest the influence of Christian ideas of Hell; on the other hand, it is possible that this element may have been associated with *draugar* (the walking dead) before the advent of Christianity, at least when they were influenced by traditions about dragons.³⁷ It seems, therefore, that *Hervararkviða* can hardly be later than the early twelfth century. If we take the element of fire to be derived from the Christian idea that the heathen dead suffer in Hell-fire, the poem cannot be earlier than the Christian missionaries of the early eleventh century, but if this association is rejected, no *terminus a quo* can be established. Hervör’s statement (st. 26,5–8) that she would rather have the sword Tyrfingr than possess all Norway suggests that it is probably of Norwegian origin.

Like several other eddic poems, *Hervararkviða* is cast almost entirely in dialogue, and falls into four scenes:

A: Prologue. (1–5)

1. A speaker unidentified by either name or gender complains of no longer being able to boast of noble parentage although ‘she’ (presumably the speaker’s mother) enjoyed the favour of Fróðmarr; now the speaker’s father has been said to be a swineherd (st. 1).
2. A second speaker replies that the first has been told a lie; the questioner’s father was in fact Angantýr, a brave warrior whose ‘hall sprinkled with earth’ (i.e. funeral mound) is in the south on Sámsey (st. 2).
3. The first speaker addresses the other as foster-father, and declares a desire ‘to visit my kinsmen who have passed on’; they will have enough wealth to supply the speaker (st. 3). She must quickly bind her woman’s headdress round her head, but tomorrow a shirt and cloak (i.e. male garments) must be cut for her (st. 4).

Coda. The speaker asks her mother to equip her in every way as if she were her son, says her dreams will prove true and she will get little happiness here in the near future (st. 5).

This prologue is a scene of a familiar type (cf. *Vafþrúðnismál* 1–4, and the prose introduction to *Grímnismál*), in which a dialogue takes place in the protagonist’s home between him (or in this case her) and a close relative; its function is to explain the quest on which he or she is about to embark.³⁸

The prose saga explains this scene by saying that Hervör, the female protagonist, is the daughter of Angantýr’s widow, Sváfa, and that her foster-father is Sváfa’s father, Bjarmarr jarl (whose name is presumably derived from that of the Swedish province of Bjarmaland). One day, a malicious thrall tells Hervör that Sváfa slept with ‘the worst thrall’, and that she herself is the result of that union, but the jarl has given orders that she should not be told her parentage; Hervör angrily confronts the jarl, and the poem begins.³⁹

But this account does not agree with the poem: it gives no explanation of Fróðmarr (st. 1,3), of Hervör’s dreams (st. 5,5–6), of why Hervör should have supposed that her father was noble in the first place, or most seriously, how Hervör knows that when she speaks to her dead father, the thing she wants from him is the sword Tyrfingr (see st. 11,5–8). Furthermore, it requires us to accept a highly suspicious coincidence, for later in the saga another Hervör (the granddaughter of this character) will be the foster-daughter of another Fróðmarr jarl,⁴⁰ who has no role in the saga other than this passing mention.

It seems to me that the implication of the poem itself (as opposed to what the saga makes of it) is that Sváfa became the wife or mistress of Fróðmarr jarl after the death of Angantýr, and that Hervör had grown up supposing herself to be Fróðmarr's daughter; there is no evidence for the name Bjarmarr in the poem, and it looks like an attempt by the saga-compiler to import a Swedish setting into Norwegian material.⁴¹ This would explain Hervör's complaint (st. 1), her immediate use of the term *fóstri* 'foster-relative' as soon as she learns the truth (st. 3,2), and her insistence that her dead relatives will have enough wealth to provide for her (because she is not entitled to inherit Fróðmarr's wealth, or perhaps would not accept it).

This much could be gathered from the verse that survives; but her insistence on the truth of her dreams and her knowledge about Tyrfingr remain problematic. It is possible that about two stanzas may be lost at the beginning: one in which Hervör dreamed that her ancestry and fortunes lay outside Fróðmarr's household and about the sword Tyrfingr, and a second in which someone told her that the dream was untrue and her father was a swineherd. On the other hand, a prologue of six stanzas plus coda would be unusually long, and it seems more likely that the details of the story were well known (once Hervör's identity had been guessed by the audience), so that it was unnecessary for the poet to explain them.

The denial of the dream may have come from a thrall in the story assumed by the poet, as the false information does in the prose, but since the thrall in the prose reflects the fictional swineherd-lover in st. 1, this cannot be trusted. The opening of st. 2:

‘Logit er margt at þér
lítill of efni’

‘You have been told a great lie
about a small matter’

suggests that the lying information did not come from the foster-father (though one can understand how his patronising tone might increase Hervör's resentment and alienation). Perhaps it is most likely that the liar in the assumed story was Sváfa, and that her motive was to dissuade Hervör from setting out on the perilous expedition (as Frigg tries to dissuade Óðinn in *Vafþrúðnismál* 2, N-K 45). In that case, Hervör's address to her mother as *sannfróð* 'wise in the truth' (st. 5,3) would carry a double irony: Hervör means that Sváfa knew all along that the dream was reliable, but the poet may also mean that Sváfa knows, as Hervör does not, that the ultimate outcome of the expedition will be disaster for their family. The word *sannfróðr* may also imply magical or other esoteric knowledge (as the adjective *fróðr* certainly does when applied to the giant *Vafþrúðnir* in *Vafþrúðnismál* 26,2; 28,2; 34,2, see N-K 49, 51), in which case we should perhaps assume that Hervör also learns from her mother how to set about raising her dead father.

It is already clear that this is to be an example of encounter with a close relative in the Other World, but that it will be an unusual one, since the protagonist is female. This brings the nature of her femininity into question, especially since she announces her intention to dress like a man and wants to be treated by her mother as if she were a son. It is of course common in folktale for the heroine to adopt male clothing, and it may be seen as admirable when done out of love, as a means of escape, or in order to carry out vengeance. It is unlikely that Hervor has any of these reasons; her motive is probably assumed to be self-protection, since she is later addressed as *vinr víkinga* ‘friend of Vikings’ (st. 8,3), and presumably cannot afford to be recognised as a woman by her shipmates. This must also be regarded as an acceptable motive in legendary terms.

Outside the realm of legend, it was not thought compatible with Old Norse womanhood to wear male clothes; for example, when Guðrún Ósvífrsdóttir wants to persuade Þórðr Ingunnarson to divorce his wife Auðr, she begins by asking whether it is true that Auðr always wears men’s trousers and leg-bindings (*Laxdæla saga* ch. 35),⁴² well aware that this would be grounds for divorce. Hervor’s adoption of male clothing and a male role therefore raises an immediate tension between admiration for her courage and social reservations about her abandonment of womanliness; the final resolution of this tension will depend on whether we can approve of her role and motivation in the rest of the story.

B. Encountering the Watchman (6–10)

I. R Version:

1. In a half-stanza, the herdsman asks what man has come to the island, and advises ‘him’ to seek lodging (st. 6b).
 2. The protagonist replies that she doesn’t know any of the islanders and asks the way to Hjörvarðr’s mounds (st. 7).
 3. The islander says that this is a mad question and invites the protagonist to join him in flight, for to be outside is dangerous for human beings (st. 8).
 4. The protagonist replies that she would scorn to hide even if the whole island were on fire; dead men won’t frighten her so easily, and she suggests further talk (with the herdsman, or with the dead?) (st. 9).
- Coda. The islander says he regards the ‘man’ who is going away as foolish to walk alone in this dangerous darkness; fires are raging, the mounds opening, and he resolves to flee faster (st. 10).

II. HU Version:

1. In an extra half-stanza of narrative, the young maid meets a herdsman in Múnarvág at sunset (st. 6a). This is followed by

- st. 6b, as in R: the herdsman asks what man has come to the island, and advises 'him' to seek lodging (st. 6b).
2. The protagonist replies that she doesn't know any of the islanders and asks the way to Hjørvarðr's mounds (st. 7).
 3. The islander says that this is a mad question and invites the protagonist to join him in flight, for to be outside is dangerous for human beings (st. 8).
 4. The protagonist offers the herdsman a necklace for his advice, but says it will be hard to dissuade 'the warriors' friend' (i.e. herself); no one, she adds, could offer her such fair jewels that she would be persuaded not to go (st. 8A).
 5. The islander says he regards the 'man' who is going away as foolish to walk alone in this dangerous darkness; fires are raging, the mounds opening, and he resolves to flee faster (st. 10). [st. 10 precedes st. 9 in HU, probably in order to preserve the regular alternation of speakers.]
 6. The protagonist replies that she would scorn to hide even if the whole island were on fire; dead men won't frighten her so easily, and she suggests further talk (st. 9).
- Coda: In a further narrative stanza, the herdsman flees to the woods, but this only increases the determination of Hervor (st. 10A). [U places this stanza at this point, but H has it after st. 8A.]

Each medieval manuscript of an eddic poem that has independent textual value is in a sense a text in its own right, and I am concerned with and most impressed by the austere economy of the R version; but it is still worth considering whether Tolkien is right to regard all this extra material in HU as part of the poem's original text.⁴³

St. 6a probably is 'genuine', for although it is not in dialogue it does complete a defective stanza and identify the herdsman; and a similarly unique stanza of narrative appears at the same point in the structure of *Vafþrúðnismál* (st. 5). St. 8A might also be original (see below), but the consequent reversal of order of stt. 9, 10 can hardly be so, despite Tolkien's argument that the protagonist's reference to fire in st. 9, 1–4 is a reply to the herdsman's mention of it (st. 10,7). This re-ordering would contradict the herdsman's apparent statement that the protagonist is going away (st. 10,1–4), which implies that their conversation has ended; and his description of the mounds opening (st. 10,6) would be premature if the protagonist had not yet left him (see below). St. 10A cannot be original, since the herdsman's flight to the woods contradicts his earlier insistence on the need to seek shelter indoors (stt. 6,3–4; 8,7–8).⁴⁴ The casual

naming of Hervor in st. 10A,8 also destroys the mounting tension over the enigma of the protagonist's name, which is properly resolved only when she finally names herself (see below).

This episode, like the preceding one, is recognisable as a conventional encounter between the protagonist and a watchman whose function is to try to frighten him or her out of proceeding with the quest. It usually takes place when the hero(ine) first arrives in the Other World (cf. *Skírnismál* 11–13, where the watchman is again a herdsman (N-K 71–72), as the prose saga says he is here; in both cases, the watchman fails to answer the protagonist's request for directions, but these are not finally needed).⁴⁵

It is immediately clear (even in the briefer text of R) that the scene has shifted to the island, which we know must be Sámsey,⁴⁶ and that the islander thinks the protagonist is a man. It is possible that her consciousness of herself as a woman may be reflected in an undercurrent of sexual insecurity in her retort that she does not know any of the *eyjarskeggja* – 'island-beards' (st. 7,4), but as Modern Icelandic uses this word neutrally to mean 'island people', its implications may have been equally gender-neutral in Old Norse. A similar awareness of her own actual gender may be suggested in st. 8A (if it is original to the poem), where the protagonist refers to herself by the masculine title *drengja vinr* 'friend of warriors' (st. 8a,3), but then adds that no gift of fair jewels (*fríðar hnossir*, st. 8A,6) could dissuade her from going on, for the noun *hnoss* is used several times in eddic verse to refer to women's jewellery.⁴⁷

There is also a paradox in her request to be directed towards the grave-mounds (st. 7,7–8), suggesting that she is more comfortable with dead kinsmen than with living strangers. The other paradox, that she is more 'manly' than the undoubtedly male islander, is more obvious; but the scene ends with a further brilliant device, where we see the protagonist from the islander's point of view as she leaves him, the fires flare up and the grave mounds open. This distant view prepares for the next shift of scene, and also suggests some lapse of time and distance, since the islander does not overhear stt. 11–17, but sees the mounds open, which does not happen at close quarters until st. 18. But it also makes the listener into a distant onlooker, and thereby suggests that we, the audience, may have more in common with the ordinary, rather cowardly man who looks on at a distance than with the rash magnificence of the heroine; and this marks her out as remarkable, because unlike ourselves.

It may seem problematic that up to this stage in the poem we have still not been told the heroine's name. However, this looks like a deliberate enigma, teasing the listener into guessing who the poem is about by gradually giving more clues: in st. 1 the speaker is connected with Fróðmarr, and in st. 2 is the offspring of Angantýr, who is buried on Sámsey; in stt. 4–5 she is a woman who

will dress as a man; in st. 7 she is related to Hjörvarðr; and in st. 10 the funeral mounds open to allow her to speak with the dead. After that, the guessing game is over, for she who goes to raise the dead must announce her name; but the delay in this announcement makes it all the more impressive when it comes.

C.1 Waking the Dead (11–19)

1. The heroine calls on Angantýr to wake, announces herself as Hervqr, the only daughter of him and Sváfa, and demands the sword (st. 11). She ritually calls on Hervarðr, Hjörvarðr, Hrani and Angantýr to awake from under the roots of the tree with full armour and weapons (st. 12); taunts them with having largely turned to dust if none of the brothers will speak with her (st. 13); and calls on them by name again, wishing that they may moulder away in the mound with maggots inside their ribs unless they hand over the sword, for it is unfitting for ghosts (*draugar*) to carry valuable weapons (st. 14).
2. Hervqr's father warns that she is filled with evil, asking for what will do her harm, and mad to awake the dead (st. 15); he claims that he was not buried by his kinsmen and that the two survivors possessed Tyrfingr, though only one finally became its owner (st. 16).
3. Hervqr retorts that he is lying; she wishes that the god may only allow him to rest whole in the mound if he does not have Tyrfingr; she accuses him of reluctance to give his only child her inheritance (st. 17).

Coda. Angantýr says that the gate to Hel is down and the mounds are opening; the coast of the island is ablaze and she should flee back to her ship if she can (st. 18). Hervqr replies that she does not fear his fire, or seeing his ghost standing at the mound door (st. 19).

Some of the details here require explanation. The tree under whose roots the berserks are to wake is presumably the World Tree, Yggdrasill, whose roots link the worlds of the gods, the giants and the dead.⁴⁸ Hervqr's wishes in stt. 14, 17 must be taken as magic spells to compel Angantýr to give her the sword. His reply points out that he was buried by his enemies and seems to claim that they took his sword; the two survivors are Hjálmar and Qrvar-Oddr, but as *Hjálmar's Death Song* (the first of the four poems in the saga) makes clear, the former was mortally wounded in the fight in which he killed Angantýr, so Qrvar-Oddr was the only ultimate survivor of the battle.⁴⁹ If this is what Angantýr means, Hervqr is correct in her claim that he is lying, as the outcome of this poem shows; and the saga's statement that Angantýr and his brothers

were buried with all their weapons (ch. 3), is emphatically supported by *Qrvar-Odds saga* ch. 14.⁵⁰

The last two stanzas of this section again show a clever manipulation of action through dialogue; now we see the mounds opening from Hervqr's viewpoint, and through the initial impression of engulfing fire we can make out with her the figure of her father's *draugr* (rather 'one of the walking dead' than 'ghost' in the insubstantial modern understanding of the word). Again, movement reported through dialogue is skilfully used to mark the divisions between the major sections of the poem, although one might argue that what follows is actually a continuation of the same scene, since it involves the same two speakers; the opening of Angantýr's mound forms an impressive division between Hervqr's ritual invocation of her father's hidden voice and her awe-inspiring meeting with him face to face.

This section is generically complex. Hervqr's charm begins as the appeal of a child to a dead parent of the opposite gender, like *Grógaldr* 1,⁵¹ so that we might expect it to be uttered with affection and responded to at once. But Hervqr has never known her father, and he does not respond until she compels him to; she has to name him three times, and his brothers, who are only called on twice, do not reply. She also places compulsion on him by cursing him unless he hands over the sword. This section therefore begins like the myths of family relationship with the Other World, and the fact that the heroine wants something practical also belongs to this tradition. But when the parent fails to respond, Hervqr treats him as if she were confronting the hostile *draugr* of a mound that she wishes to plunder (and indeed, in st. 19 she actually uses this word, and seems to regard him in this way).⁵² In behaving like this, she is again adopting a male role, for female approaches to the *draugr* are usually fundamentally different, and often imply a love-relationship or voluntary death rather than aggressive confrontation, as here.⁵³ Hervqr may also resemble Óðinn confronting a *völva*, who must be compelled to speak by magic, and who can be expected to give, not practical objects, but prophecy about the future (which is part of what Hervqr actually receives, though like *Qrvar-Oddr*, she does not want it).

It is also remarkable that the dead parent comes close to telling his daughter a direct lie. The information imparted by Other World figures is usually regarded as authoritatively true, and that is often the main reason for consulting them. But Hervqr's quest has been obstructed by a lie before (see stt. 1–2), whether by a thrall, as claimed by the prose saga, or possibly by her mother, as I have suggested. The themes of lying and trust are emerging as important: if Angantýr begins by telling her a lie, how can she believe anything else he tells her?

That, at any rate, is her viewpoint. But though Other World figures ought not to lie, they may deceive with truth (as famously happens in *Macbeth*). Angantýr

seems to imply that his two surviving enemies took Tyrfingr, and that since Hjalmar then died of his wounds, Qrvar-Oddr finally became its sole owner; this would be untrue. But his words, though intended to deceive, are not literally false: they could mean that the victors became technical possessors of Tyrfingr when he was killed, but that he himself finally became sole owner of it when it was buried with him; this would be true. It seems, therefore, that while Angantýr certainly tries to deceive his daughter, he does not tell her a lie.

However, this attempt at deceit fails to deflect Hervqr, whose view of Angantýr and his brothers has been antagonistic from the start. In her first speech she taunts and curses them, and calls them *megir meingjarnir* 'sons (or perhaps simply 'men') eager to do harm' (st. 13,3). It is therefore not surprising that she immediately assumes, when Angantýr tries to deny her the sword, that he is lying to her, and doing so out of avarice (st. 17,6–8). But is this really his motive, or is it only a reflection of her own nature? The first epithet he applies to her, *full feiknstafa* 'filled with evil intent' (st. 15,3), implies an attitude very similar to her view of him. It is obviously a confrontation, though one wonders whether it might also, in a perverse way, be a mutual compliment: may each of them recognise in the other an element of malicious determination which is also part of their own character, and of which they are rather proud?

Her haughty statement that it is not fitting for *draugar* to carry fine weapons (st. 14,9–10) completely ignores the question whether it is fitting for a woman to carry a sword. In one sense she is entitled to it, as Angantýr's only child; but the sword was a common symbol of masculinity,⁵⁴ and her aggressive denial that Angantýr has any right to keep it cannot but remind us that she is a woman, whose own right to it is also doubtful. Later, Hervqr promises to guard it (st. 24,1) and Angantýr prophesies (st. 29,1–4) that she will have it for a long time and tells her to keep it hidden; but neither of them says anything about her using it. This may reflect the common attitude that the only way in which a woman might possess such a weapon was as a trustee, so that she could ultimately give it to her son, as eventually happens in the saga;⁵⁵ interestingly, Hervqr seems in the poem to accept this limitation, at least while talking to her father.

C.2. The Meeting Face to Face (20–31)

The first part of this section again shows some variation of text as between R and HU.

I. R Version

1. Angantýr warns Hervqr that the sword Tyrfingr will destroy her whole lineage (st. 20); she will have a famous son called Heiðrekr who will possess it for a long time (st. 21).

2. She retorts that she thought before she sought out his 'hall' that this was the purpose for which she had become human; she urges him again to give her the sword, 'dangerous to shields, the slayer of Hjálmar' (st. 22).

II. HU Version

1. Angantýr warns Hervor that the sword Tyrfingr will destroy her whole lineage (st. 20); she will have a famous son called Heiðrekr who will possess it for a long time (st. 21).
2. Hervor threatens to curse the slain warriors so that they will enjoy no rest unless Angantýr gives her the sword, 'dangerous to shields, the slayer of Hjálmar' (st. 21A, final couplet as 22,7–8 in R).
3. Angantýr replies that Hervor is not like a human being, in that she wanders fully armed among the mounds at night (st. 21B).
4. She retorts that she thought before she sought out his 'hall' that this was the purpose for which she had become human; she urges him again to give her the sword, the work of dwarfs – it will do Angantýr no good to conceal it (st. 22, with a different final couplet).

At this point the two versions come together again:

3. Angantýr admits that the sword lies under his shoulders, wrapped in fire, but he knows of no maiden brave enough to hold it (st. 23).
4. Hervor says she will take and guard it if she can get it, and that she is not afraid of the fire, which subsides when she looks at it (st. 24).
5. He says she is foolish, though brave, to blunder into the fire with her eyes open, and that rather than allow this, he will give her the sword out of the mound (st. 25).
6. She rejoices at being given it, and thinks it better than to possess all Norway (st. 26).
7. He replies that she does not know what she is saying, and repeats that Tyrfingr will destroy her whole lineage (st. 27, in which 5–8 are an exact repeat of st. 20,5–8).
8. She retorts that she will go back to the ships, and that she does not care how her sons may quarrel in the future (st. 28).

The lacuna in R begins after st. 28, so that we are dependent on HU for our only texts of the end of the poem:

9. He prophesies that she will keep the sword contentedly for a long time, tells her to keep it hidden, and to be careful of its deadly poisoned edges (st. 29).
 10. [At this point, U adds a further stanza, made up of st. 24,1–5 (Hervör says she will take and guard it if she can get it, and that she is not afraid), then the tag line *úlfa grennir* ‘feeder of wolves’ (a title of address to a warrior), and st. 28,7–8 (however her sons may quarrel in future) (st. 29A).]
 11. Angantýr bids her farewell, saying he would readily give her the lives (i.e. lifespan?) of twelve people if she could believe him, with all the strength and endurance bequeathed by Arngrímr’s sons (i.e. himself and his brothers) (st. 30).
- Coda. She wishes they may all stay unharmed in their mounds, but she wants to leave at once, and admits that she thought herself ‘between worlds’ when the fires raged round her (st. 31).

Tolkien argues (ed. Tolkien [1960], 78–79) that stt. 21A and 21B are an original part of the poem and that Hervör’s statement in st. 22,1–4 (that she thought before visiting his ‘hall’ that this was the purpose for which she had become human) alludes to Angantýr’s remark in st. 21B that her behaviour in wandering around the mounds at night is not like that of a human being. The HU text therefore makes her reason for becoming human refer to her visit to the mound rather than to her future bearing of a glorious son, as in the R text. But Tolkien accepts the R version of st. 22,7–8 as original in that position (which must be right, since it is immediately echoed in st. 23,1–2), and so has to use the HU text of st. 22,7–8 as the ‘original’ ending of st. 21A.

This argument could be correct, but it requires a re-ordering of lines which is not that of any manuscript; and st. 21A could just as easily be a redundant re-working of Hervör’s curse in st. 14 (including reference to Angantýr’s brothers, who by this time are no longer relevant to the action). St. 21B also seems rather clumsy and banal, with an overweight first line and a number of phrases that seem to be drawn at random from elsewhere in the poem.⁵⁶ The most interesting difference between the two versions is in what Hervör regards as the purpose of her life: to gain the sword in HU, to bear a famous son in R. Both make good sense, though the R version is perhaps aesthetically preferable, since it gives her a sense of her fated role in history which is lacking in HU. St. 29A, which is only found in U, is rightly dismissed by Tolkien as a pastiche drawn from other stanzas of the poem. I shall therefore ignore all three of these stanzas in my further analysis.

Again, this section implies its ‘stage-directions’ with brilliant economy. Once she knows exactly where the sword is, Hervor begins (in the latter half of st. 24) to ‘blunder’ into the mound, but Angantýr prevents this by promising to give it to her ‘from the mound’ (i.e. without her having to enter, st. 25,6), and has given it to her by the beginning of st. 26. He apparently leaves her after his final speech (or in the middle of st. 31), for st. 31,5–8 refer to the fires raging round her in the past tense, and this implies that the mounds have now closed again.

The ambiguity about the genre of the encounter continues in this section. In some respects, it continues to look like Óðinn’s encounters with *völur*, but with the genders reversed: elements which recall this tradition are Angantýr’s attempt to frighten Hervor out of achieving what she wants (st. 18), and his prophecies of the future (stt. 20, 21, 27, 29), both of which are paralleled in *Völuspá*. But the tradition of the helpful Other World relative is ultimately dominant: consistent with this are Angantýr’s attempts to warn his daughter (stt. 20, 27); his prompt action to save her from destroying herself in the fire, even though this means giving her the sword (st. 25); his warning about the sword’s lethal edges (st. 29,5–8); and his statement that he would have given her the lifespan and strength of himself and his eleven brothers if she had been able to believe him (st. 30). It seems that the real genre of this encounter is that of the helpful Other-World relative, but that Hervor mistakenly thinks of it as an Odinic contest with a hostile Other-World figure, but with a reversal of the usual gender roles. It cannot be an exact copy of the story-type in which the hero gains a weapon from a *draugr* in a grave-mound, since that would require physical battle between father and daughter; and it is not seen as decent for the female representative of this world to fight with weapons (see above).

Tolkien notes an implied contradiction in st. 20, where Angantýr says that Hervor’s lineage will be destroyed by the sword before he has been persuaded to give it to her⁵⁷ – indeed, one might add, before he has even admitted that he has it. But Tolkien’s conclusion: ‘The verse must be displaced from a point later in the poem’, seems to me to underestimate the poet. As the poem stands, this is an implicit admission by Angantýr, following his failure to divert her purpose either by deception (st. 16) or by trying to frighten her (st. 18), that he has the sword and must eventually give it to her. It is also possible that both characters are victims of a predetermined fate, of which Hervor is the ignorant, headlong agent, while Angantýr can foresee but is powerless to prevent it.

But it may be too simple to regard Hervor merely as an example of the headstrong folly of youth. What does she mean by the first half of st. 22? A translation should probably run something like:

'I had already made up my mind before I set out to seek your hall that I had become a human being for this purpose'.

But what is 'this purpose'? Perhaps (ignoring the HU text, see above) she is reacting only to the immediately preceding prophecy of glorious offspring, and was not really listening to the more sinister prediction that preceded it; or she could mean that her destiny, to make the family glory possible, is so important that one should ignore what may come after. The fact that possession of the sword matters so much to her that she does not care about future strife between her sons (st. 28,5–8) suggests that this overriding concern for family honour may indeed be her driving motive. In that case, Angantýr's warnings of family disaster are beside the point, and he misunderstands her as much as she does him.

All the same, Hervor must to some extent be seen as imperceptive. When Angantýr gives her the sword rather than allowing her to destroy herself in the fire, it becomes clear that the real reason for his reluctance to let her have it was concern for his descendants, not the avarice she accused him of (st. 17,6–8). But she fails to notice this, either because of jubilation at her success or because her fascination with honour overrules his warnings. Imperceptive haste does seem very likely in her; once she has the sword, she can hardly wait to be gone, and pays no heed to his final offer. There is, of course, a condition attached to it, which runs like a refrain through this section of the poem:

'ef þú trúa máttir' (stt. 20,6; 27,6; 30,4)

'if you were able to believe'.

We can see that Angantýr is now telling the truth and that Hervor would be well advised to trust him; but the parent whose first ever words to his daughter contained a deliberate deceit can hardly be surprised when she subsequently disregards his truthful offers of advice and help.

To some extent, then, this last section of the poem is about the 'otherness' between parents and their children. But the 'otherness' between worlds, with which I began this paper, also surfaces literally at the end of the poem, when Hervor admits (to us, not to her father) that she thought herself 'between worlds' as the fires raged round her. In one sense, of course, it was literally the case; but 'between worlds' also had a specific sense, of terrified suspension of the senses.⁵⁸ Once Angantýr has gone back into his mound, the heroine can admit to us that her uncompromising bravado was actually a pretence: she was terrified by the fire, although it appears that she would rather have died than

admit it. This is a brilliant conclusion; it brings the remote heroine suddenly back into the experience of ordinary human beings, and thereby greatly increases our sympathy for her. Perhaps, too, it may suggest that her ferocious affectation of masculine clothes and values has been so fierce precisely because it had to be affected, and that underneath, she is a more traditional woman than she has cared to admit. Such self-control in the cause of family honour is certainly impressive. Whether it is wise is another question, one which the poet leaves his audience to consider for themselves – and so shall I.⁵⁹

NOTES

- 1 In *Vafþrúðnismál* 21 (N-K 48) the gods slay the giant Ymir and make the earth, sea, mountains, woods, sky and clouds out of parts of his body; in *Völuspá* 4 (N-K 1) they raise the earth up out of the sea. Later, they find two trees, Askr and Embla, on the shore and give them breath, intellect, hair (or perhaps blood) and a good appearance, thus creating the first man and woman (*Völuspá* 17–18, N-K 4–5).
- 2 Þórr is called *Miðgarðs véor(r)* ‘protector of the world’ (*Völuspá* 56; N-K 13), or simply *Véorr* ‘the protector’ (*Hymiskviða* 11, 17, 21; N-K 90–92). Óðinn sends his valkyries to select those who die in battle, who will join the *einheriar* ‘lone warriors’ and help the gods in their last great battle against the giants (e.g. *Vafþrúðnismál* 41; N-K 52); and when the gods fall at Ragnarøk, human beings will also depart from this life (*Völuspá* 52,7; N-K 12).
- 3 Most of the gods will fall at Ragnarøk, but they may also die at other times, as Baldr does, e.g. in *Völuspá* 31–35 (N-K 7–8).
- 4 *Hyndluljóð* tells how Freyja seeks wisdom on behalf of her human lover Óttarr (N-K 288–96), and *Rígsþula* claims that Heimdallr slept with three human women and thus became the ancestor of the three social classes of thralls, peasants and noblemen (N-K 280–87).
- 5 See e.g. *Völuspá* 40 (N-K 9), where the giant hag in the iron wood gives birth to the wolf that will destroy the sun. Snorri adds (*Gylfaginning* ch. 34, ed. Faulkes [1982], 27; trans. Faulkes [1987], 26) that she is called Angrboða ‘presager of grief’ and that her children are the wolf Fenrir, the *Miðgarðsormr* ‘World serpent’, and Hel, who presides over the world of the dead.
- 6 See the giant Prymr in *Prymskviða* 8 (N-K 112), the dwarf Alvíss in *Alvíssmál* 1–4 (N-K 124).
- 7 e.g. *Durinn* ‘the one who has been put to sleep’, *Nár* ‘corpse’, *Aurvangr* ‘clay-cheek’, *Haugspori* ‘mound prowler’, in *Völuspá* 10, 12, 13, 15 (N-K 3–4).
- 8 See McKinnell (2003), 110–14.

- 9 Thus the speaker in *Völuspá* 2 claims to have been brought up by giants and to remember the nine worlds of the dead (N-K 1); the *völva* in *Baldur's draumar* 5,8 says she has been dead for a long time (N-K 277).
- 10 This happens as the dead Brynhildr rides to Hel, so the reproachful hag is presumably also dead; see *Helreið Brynhildar* 1–3 (N-K 219–20).
- 11 See McKinnell (2005), 62–80.
- 12 See McKinnell (2005), 81–94, and essay 11 above.
- 13 See McKinnell (2003), 126–28; McKinnell (2005), 95–108.
- 14 See McKinnell (2005), 109–46.
- 15 See McKinnell (2005), 181–96.
- 16 See McKinnell (2005), 147–71.
- 17 See McKinnell (2005), 172–80.
- 18 See McKinnell (2005), 200–15. For the variation of this pattern in the *Ljóðatal* section of *Hávamál*, see essay 5 above.
- 19 See McKinnell (2005), 218–34.
- 20 See e.g. the Old English *Juliana* 242–558 (ed. Woolf [1977], 31–47; trans. Bradley [1982], 308–15).
- 21 Interestingly, however, the author of the *South English Legendary* doubts whether this story can be true – see *St. Margaret*, ll. 157–70 (ed. d'Evelyn and Mill [1956], I, 297).
- 22 *Skírnismál* 30,4–6; 31,1–3; 35,1–3 (N-K 75–76); this is equated with *ergi oc æði oc óþola* ‘perversion, madness and intolerable [desire]’, *Skírnismál* 36,3–4.
- 23 Examples include the abduction of Iðunn by Þjazi in Þjóðólfr of Hvin's *Haustlög* 9–13 (Skj. I B, 16–17; Kock I, 10–11); Þrymr's demand for Freyja's hand in marriage in *Þrymskviða* (N-K 111–15); and the demand for an unnamed goddess (or possibly a human woman) made by Alvið in *Alvíssmál* (N-K 124–29). Further, see the idea of ‘negative reciprocity’ in marriage in Clunies Ross (1994–98), I, 103–43.
- 24 *Skáldskaparmál* ch. G56, ed. Faulkes (1998), I, 2; McKinnell (2005), 62–64.
- 25 *Ynglinga saga* chs. 13, 14, 19, ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson (1941), 28–31, 37–39.
- 26 See Meulengracht Sørensen (1980), 22–23, 78; Meulengracht Sørensen (1983), 19, 63–64.
- 27 See *Háleygjatal* 4 (Skj. I B, 60; Kock I, 37).
- 28 *Gesta Danorum* III.iv.1–8, ed. Friis-Jensen and trans. Zeeberg (2005), I, 204–09; trans. Fisher and Davidson (1979–80), I, 76–78.
- 29 *Hávamál* 96–102 (N-K 31–32), and see essay 4 above.
- 30 *Kjalnesinga saga* ch. 18, ed. Jóhannes Halldórsson (1959), ÍF 14, 42–43; cf. ch. 15, p. 37; trans. Cook and Porter (1997), *CSI* 3, 326–27, cf. 323–24.
- 31 *Örvar-Odds saga* chs. 21–22 (*FSN* I, 350–55).
- 32 *Bárðar saga* ch. 21, ed. Þorhallur Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson (1991),

ÍF 13, 169–70; trans. Anderson (1997), *CSI* 2, 265.

33 SG I, 196.

34 For the text of the R version (from Reykjavík, MS Gl.kgl.sml. 2845 4to, late 14th or early 15th century), see ed. Tolkien (1960), 10–19. The HU version, based on MSS Reykjavík AM 544 4to (Hauksbók, early 14th century) and Uppsala R:715 (a mid-17th-century copy of a lost medieval MS) contains four and a half stanzas (five and a half in U) that are not in R; for these, which are discussed in the analysis below, see Tolkien (1960), 76–79. A leaf has been lost from R after st. 28, so that we are forced to rely on the HU version for the last three stanzas of the poem. For the purposes of this paper, the (presumably later) prose with which the poem is interspersed should be ignored.

35 See Mundt (1990), 420–23; more tentatively, she suggests (409–10) that *Hervararkviða* may also date from the beginning of the twelfth century, and this seems likely.

36 ed. Tolkien (1960), 12. I have numbered the stanzas of the R version of the poem stt. 1–31; these correspond to stt. 13–43 in Tolkien's edition of the whole saga; readers can therefore find the correct stanzas in that edition by adding 12 to the stanza-numbers given here. Additional stanzas in the HU version are numbered with letters following the number of the preceding stanza.

37 On *draugar*, see Simek (1993), 65; Pulsiano (1993), 623–24; Chadwick (1946); Hume (1980) (especially 9–14, where she develops the interesting idea that the *draugr* represents an unacceptable Jungian 'shadow' of the hero himself, with his inherent violence and ambition for weapons or gold, but without his socialisation); Ruggerini (1995), 238–40 and footnote 81.

The earliest evidence of fire associated with *draugar*, so far as I know, is the mysterious firelight in the cave of Grendel's mother in *Beowulf* 1516–17, ed. Fulk, Bjork and Niles (2008), 52 and note on 207; trans. Bradley (1982), 451; trans. Heaney (1999), 50. In *Grettis saga* ch. 18, ed. Guðni Jónsson (1936), ÍF 7, 56–61; trans. Fox and Hermann Pálsson (1974), 36–38, a fire is what draws the hero's attention to the mound in which he later fights the *haugbúi* 'mound dweller', but it has no subsequent function. Sometimes a *draugr* or giant seems to acquire the fire-breathing abilities of a dragon when the hero invades his mound or cave in search of treasure: see e.g. *Andra saga jarls*; *Orms þáttur Stórolfssonar* chs. 8–9, ed. Þorhallur Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson (1991), ÍF 13, 415–18; trans. Driscoll (1997), 464–65, though here the fire-breather is the giant's mother, in the form of a black cat; Schlauch (repr. 1973), 142; Ruggerini (1995), 240 and footnote 81. A few avaricious men are also transformed into fire-breathing dragons (though they do not seem to have been *draugar* beforehand): see *Ectors saga* ch. 8 (ed. Loth [1962], 110), *Hálfðanar saga Eysteinnssonar* ch. 20 (*FSN* III, 311), *Völsunga saga* ch. 14 (*FSN* I, 32; trans. Byock 59).

Elsewhere, fire becomes a weapon used against the *draugr*: the body is burnt and its ashes scattered in a remote, uncultivated place to prevent further haunting (see e.g. *Grettis saga* ch. 35, ed. Guðni Jónsson [1936], ÍF 7, 122; trans. Fox and Hermann Pálsson [1974], 79; *Eyrbyggja saga* ch. 63, ed. Einar Ólafur Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson [1935], ÍF 4, 170; trans. Hermann Pálsson and Edwards [1989], 156; trans. Quinn [1997], *CSI* 5, 212).

This discussion disregards stories in which a mesmerising light issues from the eyes of the *draugr*, where the light seems to be related to moonlight rather than to fire; see e.g. Egill Skallagrímsson's *Arinbjarnarkviða* 5 (*Skj.* I B, 38; Kock I, 25; *Egils saga*, trans. Fell [1975], 150, 199); *Grettis saga* ch. 35 (see above); Ruggerini (1995), 216 and footnotes 27, 28.

I have not found any clear parallel to *Hervararkviða*'s dangerous generalised fire in the mound (as opposed to mysterious light, or fire breathed at the hero by a dragon-derived monster); it is therefore hard to know whether destructive fire was associated with the dwellings of *draugar* before Norse ideas about the dead became tinged with the Christian image of the flames of Hell.

38 Ruggerini, in McKinnell and Ruggerini (1994), 145–53.

39 ed. Tolkien (1960), 10.

40 See ch. 8, ed. Tolkien (1960), 30.

41 See Mundt (1990), 421–23.

42 Ed. Einar Ólafur Sveinsson (1934), ÍF 5, 95; trans. Hermann Pálsson and Magnús Magnússon (1969), 126; trans. Kunz (1997b), *CSI* 5, 48.

43 Tolkien (1960), 76–77.

44 Tolkien (1960), 13 avoids part of the problem by translating *úti* (st. 8,7) as 'out in the open' (as opposed, presumably, to the forest); but the normal usages of this word in both prose and verse are either 'out of doors' or 'out at sea' (see CV 671, *LP* 585), and I have found no other example of the sense he suggests.

45 For another example of the discouraging watchman scene, cf. *Svipdagsmál* (*Fjölsvinnsmál*, especially stt. 2–4).

46 Sámsey (the Danish island now called Samsø) seems to have had a reputation as an island of magic (and possibly of sex-changing); cf. *Lokasenna* 24 (N-K 101), where Loki says that people there knew that Óðinn had practised enchantment and banged on the drum like a witch.

47 See *Guðrúnarkviða II* 20,2 (N-K 227); *Atlamál* 57,4 (N-K 255); *Guðrúnarhvat* 18,10 (N-K 267); in skaldic verse, see also *Stríðkeravísur* l. 1 (*Skj.* I B, 591; Kock I, 288). However, *LP* also lists six cases where the treasures concerned are military equipment or rewards from rulers to male retainers (though only one of these is in an Eddic poem), and three skaldic cases in which the context is religious, so the implication of female jewellery is not certain.

48 See *Gylfaginning* ch. 15, ed. Faulkes (1982), 17; trans. Faulkes (1987), 17.

- 49 See *Heiðreks saga*, ed. Tolkien (1960), 7–10.
- 50 See *Heiðreks saga*, ed. Tolkien (1960), 10; *Ørvar-Odds saga* ch. 14 (*FSN* I, 330).
- 51 *SG* I, 196.
- 52 The word *draugr* is rare in verse, but cf. also *Harðar saga*, st. 9,3 (ch. 15, ed. Þórhallur Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson [1991], ÍF 13, 42), where it is applied by the hero to the *draugr* of a dead Viking with whom he is wrestling in his grave-mound; this tale, in which the hero is helped by a disguised Óðinn, ends with him taking the Viking's treasure, sword and helmet from the mound. The word also appears in *Rögnvaldr kali, lausavísa* 3,4 (*Skj.* I B, 479; Kock I, 235; *Orkneyinga saga* ch. 61, ed. Finnbogi Guðmundsson [1965], ÍF 34, 133; trans. Taylor 227) in the context of an unsuccessful attempt to gain treasure from a cave believed to be inhabited by a *draugr*.
- The story told in *Grettis saga* ch. 18 (see note 37 above) resembles this one in many respects: Grettir goes at the close of day to the burial mound of the dead Kárr inn gamli, which is on an island, and fights the dead man (who, however, is called a *haugbúi* 'mound-dweller', not a *draugr*), obtaining from him his treasure and a magnificent short sword which he had not given to his own son while he lived. This tale also includes fire in the mound (which is not present in *Harðar saga* or *Orkneyinga saga*), though it is apparently there to attract attention rather than posing a physical threat to the hero.
- 53 See Chadwick (1946), especially 53–58.
- 54 See e.g. *Völundarkviða* 18 (N-K 120); *Laxdæla saga* chs. 30, 46 (ed. Einar Ólafur Sveinsson [1934], ÍF 5, 80–83, 140–42; trans. Magnús Magnússon and Hermann Pálsson [1969], 113–15, 163–65; trans. Kunz [1997b], *CSI* 5, 41, 72); cf. also *Piðriks saga* ch. 404, ed. Bertelsen (1905–11), II, 304–5; trans. Haymes (1988), ch. 377, p. 230, where Högni refuses to hand over his weapons to Grímhildr on the grounds that she is a woman.
- 55 See ch. 5, ed. Tolkien (1956), 26; ch. 4, ed. and trans. Tolkien (1960), 22. The prose saga does have a single paragraph in which Hervör kills a man who draws the sword while admiring it (ch. 4, ed. and trans. Tolkien [1960], 20); but the R version is lost at this point, there is no verse supporting this incident, and it may have been added by either the saga-writer or the HU redactor to reinforce the motif that the sword must kill someone each time it is drawn (see ch. 1, ed. and trans. Tolkien [1960], p. 2).
- 56 For *mær ung* (st. 21B,1), see also st. 6A,1; *hjálmi ok með brynju* (st. 21B,7) exactly and rather redundantly repeats st. 12,5; and *fyr hallar dyrr* (21B,8) may be derived from *fyr durum standa* (19,8).
- 57 ed. Tolkien (1960), 16, footnote 3.
- 58 See *Grettis saga* ch. 35, ed. Guðni Jónsson (1936), ÍF 7, 121; trans. Fox and Hermann Pálsson (1974), 79; *Þorsteins þátrr uxafóts* ch. 11, ed. Þórhallur

Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson (1991), ÍF 13, 364; trans. Clark (1997), (ch. 10), *CSI* 4, 351; both are in the context of fights with Other World creatures.

- 59 I should like to thank Maria Elena Ruggerini for much help and encouragement in writing this paper, and especially for her advice on the difficult subject of *draugar*.

Abbreviations

AEW	de Vries, Jan. 1977. <i>Altnordische Etymologisches Wörterbuch</i> . 2nd ed. Leiden: Brill.
ANF	<i>Arkiv för nordisk filologi</i> .
ASB	<i>Altnordische Saga-Bibliothek</i> 1–18. 1892–1929.
ASC	Earle, J., and C. Plummer, eds. 1892–99. <i>Two of the Saxon Chronicles Parallel</i> . I–II. Oxford: Clarendon.
ASPR	Krapp, G.P., and E. van K. Dobbie, eds. 1931–53. <i>The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records</i> . I–VI, New York: Columbia UP.
BGDSL (H)	<i>Beiträge zur Geschichte der deutschen Sprache und Literatur (Halle)</i> .
BGDSL (T)	<i>Beiträge zur Geschichte der deutschen Sprache und Literatur (Tübingen)</i> .
BT	Bosworth, Joseph, and C. Northcote Toller. 1898. <i>An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary</i> . Oxford: OUP, C. Northcote Toller. 1921. <i>Supplement</i> . Oxford: OUP, Alistair Campbell. 1972. <i>Enlarged Addenda and Corrigenda</i> . Oxford: Clarendon.
CASSS	Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture.
Child	Child, Francis J., ed. 1882–98. <i>The English and Scottish Popular Ballads</i> . 5 vols. Boston: Houghton Mifflin; reprinted (1965), New York: Dover.
CPB	Guðbrandur Vigfússon, ed. 1883. <i>Corpus Poeticum Boreale</i> . 2 vols. Oxford: Clarendon.
CSI	Viðar Hreinsson, ed. 1997. <i>The Complete Sagas of Icelanders</i> , 5 vols. Reykjavík: Leifur Eiríksson.
CV	Cleasby, Richard, and Guðbrandur Vigfússon. 1957. <i>An Icelandic-English Dictionary</i> . 2nd ed. with supplement by William A. Craigie.
DC	<i>Disticha Catonis</i> .
DGF	<i>Danmarks gamle folkeviser</i> , ed. Grundtvig and others. 1853–1976.
Dronke I	Dronke, Ursula, ed. and trans. 1969. <i>The Poetic Edda I: Heroic Poems</i> . Oxford: Clarendon.

Dronke II	Dronke, Ursula, ed. and trans. 1997. <i>The Poetic Edda II: Mythological Poems</i> . Oxford: Clarendon.
EETS	Early English Text Society.
FSN	Guðni Jónsson, and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson, eds. 1943–44. <i>Fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda</i> . 3 vols. Reykjavík: Bókaútgáfan Forni.
Gen.	Genesis.
Háv.	<i>Hávamál</i> .
Hgsv.	<i>Hugsvinnsmál</i> .
ÍF	Íslenzk fornrit. 1933–. Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag.
JEGP	<i>Journal of English and Germanic Philology</i> .
KJ	Krause, Wolfgang, and Herbert Jankuhn, eds. 1966. <i>Die Runeninschriften im älteren Futhark</i> . Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht.
KLNM	Andersson, Ingvar, and John Granlund, eds. 1956–78. <i>Kulturhistoriskt lexikon för nordisk medeltid</i> . 22 vols. Malmö: Allhem.
Kock I–II	Kock, Ernst A., ed. 1946–49. <i>Den Norsk-Isländska Skaldediktningen</i> . 2 vols. Lund: Gleerup.
LP	Finnur Jónsson. 1931. <i>Lexicon Poeticum Antiquae Linguae Septentrionalis</i> . 2nd ed. Copenhagen: Lyngé.
MGH	Monumenta Germaniae Historica.
NGL	Keyser, Rudolph, Peter A. Munch, Gustav Storm, and Ebbe Hertzberg, eds. 1846–95. <i>Norges gamle love indtil 1387</i> . 5 vols. Christiania: C. Grøndahl.
NIYR	<i>Norges innskrifter med de yngre runer I–VI</i> . 1941–. ed. Sophus Bugge, Oluf Rygh, Ingvald Undset, Magnus Olsen, Aslak Liestøl, and James Knirk. Oslo: Norsk historisk kjeldeskriftinstitutt.
N-K	Neckel, Gustav, ed. 1962. <i>Edda: Die Lieder des Codex Regius. I. Text</i> . 3rd ed. revised by Hans Kuhn. Heidelberg: Winter.
OE	Old English.
ON	Old Norse.
PMLA	<i>Publications of the Modern Language Association of America</i> .
Rev.	The Book of Revelations.
Saxo	<i>Saxo Grammaticus, Gesta Danorum</i> , ed. Friis-Jensen and trans. Zeeberg. 2005; trans. Fisher and Davidson. 1979–80.
SB	<i>Saga-Book</i> .
SG I–III	Sijmons, Barent, and Hugo Gering, eds. 1924–31. <i>Die Lieder der Edda</i> . 3 vols. Halle: Waisenhauses.
Skj.	Finnur Jónsson, ed. 1908–15. <i>Den Norske-Islandske Skjaldedigtning I–II A–B</i> . Copenhagen / Christiania: Gyldendal / Nordisk Forlag.

- SMB* Bengt R. Jonsson, Margareta Jersild, and Sven-Bertil Jansson, eds. 1983–2001. *Sveriges medeltida ballader*. 5 vols. Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiksell.
- SnE* Snorri Sturluson, *Edda*.
- SPSMA* *Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages*. Vol. VII, *Poetry on Christian Subjects*. 2007. Ed. Margaret Clunies Ross. Turnhout: Brepols.

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This index is ordered according to the most usual Icelandic alphabetizing convention, by which 1) each long vowel (á, é, í, ó, ú, ý) follows its short counterpart – thus, e.g. ‘Gizurr’ precedes ‘*Gísla saga*’; 2) ð follows d; and 3) the sequence of letters at the end of the alphabet following z is þ, æ/ǣ, ö/ø/φ. The sole exception to this convention is æ in Old English names and vocabulary, which is alphabetized as ‘ae’. Additionally, as is standard Icelandic practice, Old Norse names are alphabetized by first name rather than patronymic (e.g. ‘Ingiríðr Rognvaldsdóttir’ rather than ‘Rognvaldsdóttir, Ingiríðr’), except in the case of Icelanders with a family surname, such as Sigurður Nordal.

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